

POWER LOT



SARAH
D. PLEA
GREENE



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POWER LOT



MRS. SKIPPER STOOD IN THE TALL GRASS IN HER
FLOWER GARDEN. See page 238.

POWER LOT

BY

SARAH P. McLEAN GREENE

AUTHOR OF "CAPE COD FOLKS," "VESTY OF THE
BASINS," "DEACON LYSANDER," ETC.



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CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. A MESSAGE | 9 |
| II. WITHOUT HIS LATCHKEY | 16 |
| III. UP THE HILL | 30 |
| IV. MARY STINGAREE | 46 |
| V. THE TIDE MAKES IN | 63 |
| VI. TWENTY CENTS AN HOUR | 82 |
| VII. JOGGINS—NOT SO STEEP | 97 |
| VIII. AS A PUGILIST | 115 |
| IX. AN EGG FOR A STAMP | 133 |
| X. THE PASSAGE THROUGH | 140 |
| XI. ANOTHER HILL | 157 |
| XII. THE FIGHT WITH BEASTS | 174 |
| XIII. FRIENDLY | 183 |
| XIV. MRS. BYJO'S BOARDER | 198 |
| XV. SHE OF THE WHIP-HAND | 208 |
| XVI. MRS. PROUTY OF PROUTY'S NECK | 219 |
| XVII. SKIPPER'S WIFE AND RHODY | 234 |
| XVIII. THE AUCTION | 244 |
| XIX. JACOB TRAWLES BREAKS AWAY | 261 |
| XX. SIDE-SADDLING THE LOG | 272 |
| XXI. THE TEST | 282 |
| XXII. "HE WILL STAND" | 295 |

CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XXIII. THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL EXPOSITION | 306 |
| XXIV. SEA GULLS EMBRACE | 323 |
| XXV. SCARECROW AS COMFORTER | 330 |
| XXVI. "AS FAR AS HEAVEN" | 423 |
| XXVII. THE "WRATTLE" BY THE RIVER | 351 |
| XXVIII. THE STEEP WAY | 369 |
| XXIX. MRS. BYJO KISSES HER BOARDER | 369 |
| XXX. ALL IN WHITE | 376 |
| XXXI. POWER LOT, GOD HELP US | 390 |

ILLUSTRATIONS

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| MRS. SKIPPER STOOD IN THE TALL GRASS IN HER FLOWER GARDEN | Frontispiece |
| "STOP YOUR CART," GASPED ROB, "I'M COLD—I WANT TO WALK" | FACING PAGE 36 |
| "HOW CAN YOU TURN YOUR BACK ON THAT VIEW?" | 116 |
| "WHO WANTS A HAPPY, CHEERFUL, TICKLE-YER- RIBS, CONSOLIN' PAIR 'O RUBBERS?" . . | 252 |
| "PROMISE," I SAID, STRIDING TOWARD HER . . | 328 |

POWER LOT

CHAPTER I

A MESSAGE

THE Almighty—up at Power Lot—looks as though He had at last all kinds of material to work with; infinite ocean, broad basin, mad river, far heights, and sharp valleys, bowlders that make you catch your breath, and green pastures that lie sound asleep—all kinds of such business the Almighty has at Power Lot. And so much of it! Looks as though He laughed to Himself at last for the room there was, and tossed creation about helter-skelter and gigantic free.

I remember an artist who came there once, who seemed to think that it was all arranged.

“See that touch to the middle distance,” he’d say; “watch that class of shadows; observe that symphony of hill and vale.”

But I, being no artist, sucked in my sense of it first hand; and, as I say, it looked to me as though the Almighty, having leaned from His solitudes to a long view of the cities somewhere and feeling stifled on those contraptions of walls and petty man-made ways, had turned back with an awful joy and had His rampage with our landscape there at Power Lot. I don’t mean anything irreverent either. A God-Almighty rampage with the landscape is something to make a man bow the knee.

POWER LOT, GOD HELP US,—that was the com-

plete name of our place; worse than Nazareth, you see. Yes, outsiders speaking of us said with meaning, "He lives over to Power Lot, God help us," or, "It happened at Power Lot, God help us." It may have been because it was so hard to get up to us there by the steep way; it may have been by reason of our poverty or our ignorance, but with our name was ever attached this invocation for supernal aid.

So out of Power Lot, God Help Us, came patient toilers by land and sea as well as vagabonds and ne'er-dowells with a taste for wandering, ambitionless resigned women, runaway boys and girls; and out of Power Lot, God Help Us, came Mary Stingaree.

Well named! There was a sting to Mary, for me, at least; a sting I carry with me so long as I journey over this firmament in the garment of the flesh. I am not with Mary's sort of people now; she got far beyond me in a way. But somehow I've made up my mind it's a healthy sting. It's better, I reckon, to make your try at being a man than to win your sweet desire. So Mary stung me, and stings me ever.

A little, sulky-mouthed, broad-browed, black-haired girl was Mary Stingaree. Distrustful, sulky-mouthed—that came from old Bate Stingaree, drunkard, deceased.

Down to school at Bear River we went together, Mary and I. I was in her class then. Of course the Bear River children derided us, coming from Power Lot, God Help Us.

'Way back from somewhere Mary had inherited a steady, never-failing gristmill of brains, and a singing voice like a soul quit of the flesh. Bear River was poor

in musical talent, so they let Mary in to the Baptist church to take part in a Sunday school exhibition. She sang: there were some tourists stopping at Bear River, and they applauded for delight, clapping their hands. Mary thought she was being derided again, the troubled little soul from Power Lot, God Help Us, and she went out weeping bitterly.

But the gristmill of brains kept a steadily revolving wheel. From Bear River district school to the distant academy at Wolfdale Mary worked her way. She came home on a vacation, fourteen years old now and grave as a woman.

"May I see you to evening meet'n', Mary?" said I. By this time she was sort of dissociated in everybody's mind from Power Lot, and had been admitted to the Bear River Baptist Church under deep religious conviction and a presumption of actual social equality. I sneaked along in the wake of her material welfare, wondering. Spiritually, she was lost to me.

"May I see you to evening meet'n', Mary?" said I, waylaying her at the bridge.

"I'll go back and ask Mother," said she.

I waited at the bridge. She came back, stepping demurely. "Mother says 'Yes,' Jim."

I was nineteen, of a long line of toiling progenitors not much vexed by brains. I stood in awe of the bookish little maiden. This would be a great woman; I would put in my plea early, would begin courting already. I knew a bit of rustic etiquette in that line.

"Will you take my arm, Mary?" I said.

She blushed deeply, religiously.

"I couldn't do that, Jim," she said. "It would

mean too much—it would be too intimate,” said the bookish little maiden. “But I will take your hand, Jim.”

So, hand clasped in hand, we went to the evening meeting at Bear River. Very proper and formal that may have seemed to wise little Mary Stingaree, but to me, it was vastly tender. Her slender hand nestled in my broad one—I can feel it still. And I would have been content if the road from Power Lot, God Help Us, to Bear River had wound on and on through this mortal lifetime. That brief hour was my portion. Mary’s ideas of convention changed.

The gristmill of brains kept steadily turning. From academy to provincial college Mary worked her way; then across the water to the highest seat of learning in the States; then a post-graduate course and a degree; and then, by reason of her marked ability, a position of distinction at the head of a seminary.

Just at that climax of her toiling ambition old Bate Stingaree fell in a drunken fit and broke his neck. A flock of evil crows swooped down over the Stingaree fortunes. The mother, half-paralyzed, took to her bed. The younger brother, a clean, straight fellow, went down with his fishing boat in a hurricane off the Gut. The older brother, dissolute like his father, had lost his position in a cloth manufactory in the States and came home in rags. Mary was sent for and took leave of absence to come home to her father’s funeral.

It was the solemn desolation of winter there by the hills and gorges and the pounding, seething shores that lay off in view of Power Lot, God Help Us. The wind swept with endless moan through the cypress forests.

When Mary saw how it was with her people at home her eyes for a moment had that very look of the world without, just that look as of bleak gorges and the passion of the waves surging back, moaning and thwarted, from the shore. Then her lips took on the strength of the hills and their quiet, too. She had grown tall and straight. She was more than beautiful; she was what my soul had prophesied: she was a great woman.

"Jim," she said to me, "you are one of that fated kind of whom it is easy to ask things, of whom one is always morally sure that no request will be refused. You have not reformed, like the rest of us. You have not had advantages."

There was an elf in her black eyes that might have been wicked, I had sometimes thought, except for stern schooling and the quiet habit of the big strong mouth. She smiled at me.

"I have read all the books you sent me, Mary," I replied, "three times over. I don't know what I should have done without them. I've been waiting to thank——"

"No," she interrupted me meditatively, "you have not reformed. I don't believe you ever will. You have not had advantages."

I could almost have sworn that she was fond of me. But it was in a way too high for me to take any notice of. I understood that. The kindness in her eyes was hard to bear. It was the sort to lure a child or a big, trusty Newfoundland. But first and last I adored her, and I stood confused to all except that she was near me, looking at me, and that I was ready to do her bidding.

"The sea is rough—cruel and rough—to-day, Jim," she said, "and there would be danger out there to-day, even to the staunchest little fishing vessel, managed by the most skillful hand that ever was?—danger even to Jim Turbine?"

I laughed. "You used to know better about the sea and the weather. Your advantages have left *her* out," I added, with a jealous eye to the spars of my boat, rocking down there under the ledge.

"And I'm selfish," she went on. "My one spar of hope up here would be—Jim Turbine. And I don't see," she went on, drearily, half-dreamily, looking toward the water, "how anyone of mortal frailty could trust himself to-day out on that heaving, tigerish waste of waters and—live."

"You used to love the sea, Mary."

"I used to love"—some bitterness curled her lip—"many things. Now, what I have to do is to send a message, Jim. And if possible it should be sent at once. A message by wire from the station over at Waldeck. But it may be softer weather to-morrow."

"You've remembered what we say, here, about the weather being 'soft' sometimes," I answered gratefully. "But it *is* soft, for winter, Mary—right down soft; it won't be any softer for weeks. A boat's easy managed out there, if you know how." I laughed again. I had no fear, even of taking Mary over to Waldeck. The sea was not running either stormy or strong, to my way of thinking.

"Will you take my message over, then?"

"You—wouldn't have to go?"

"No." She smiled. "I could write it down, and you

could take it. And I"—she added gravely—"should always be in your debt for a very, very great kindness."

"You get it ready, Mary," I said, blusteringly, for I was disappointed and chagrined. A telegram had been to my mind a sort of rite which demanded personal supervision. "You go and get it ready right now, and I'll take it over."

"My good—brother—Jim," she said, with eloquent eyes; and with that I had to make myself content, just a good brother waiting there to go out and cross the winter bay for her, who was no sister to me, but so much my heart's desire that every sense of my body ached stupidly. Then I got to thinking of her, and what the message probably was. I knew, before she came back to me with it,—a folded slip of paper that I buttoned up in my inner pocket. Then I hesitated.

"It isn't sealed orders, to me," I said. "I—I'm afraid I know what you are going to do."

"Well?"

"You are going—to give up your position—that you've been working for—all these years."

Her face was pale and set, but she kept her pleasant humor. "You are a wizard, Jim. You have something far and away beyond advantages: you can read writing up a flight of stairs and behind doors. You——"

"Yes, I can," I said. "I can read it all right every time. But you just stop and think, Mary. Some other woman could manage this miserable business here. But *you!* Good Lord!"

"It's my mother and my brother, Jim. It's my *mother*. I have 'thought,' never fear. I have made up my mind. Say no more about it."

"You ain't fit for it. You're fit for the place you've been filling back there. You've no right to go and knock it all over. It's—it's burying yourself alive."

She put her hand lightly on my rough coat, but somehow it impelled me toward the door. She smiled again in that moment as we stood looking off from the heights of Power Lot.

"'Buried alive,'" she repeated, her lip twitching; "this is more like a vantage ground for ascension. Don't you think so, Jim?"

"All right, you can smile, now. It will kill you inch by inch, though, as you go on. It will break your heart. You've got used to such different things—and the ambition of you—my Lord! And you've changed. Why, when I first saw you I thought I'd have to say 'Miss Stingaree.' I think so now half the time when I look at you."

"'Miss Stingaree' would forsake this and go back to her business?"

"Yes, and she'd have a good right to do it."

"What would 'Mary' do, according to what you remember of her?"

She was looking at me so intensely she seemed to forget that my big body was there covering my soul. She fished up my soul and I had to see it the way it was. And I had to speak, too, and speak quick.

"Oh, d—n," I swore, "she'd 'a' stayed."

"There's so much of 'Mary' left in me that it bothers me, Jim," she said, in her whimsical way, but I thought there was a dash of honest fretfulness in it. "Mother—clings to me. And Bate—the case is desperate altogether. It seems to demand someone of their

own, who is bound by duty, and who understands and can have patience. I tried to think it was common sense to go. I could earn money for them back there,—but *I can't go*. And when you can't go there's no way but to stay. I thought you would have been glad to have me stay."

"I reckon, I was a-thinkin' of *you*."

"Perhaps you were. You used to have a habit, quite strong, of letting your thoughts go moonshining about in the interests of other people. I dare say it has grown upon you, as bad habits do."

It isn't any fun to have eyes like Mary Stingaree's caressing of you, when it's all got to stop there, and your part is just to plod out the path of the good brother. I stepped outside for a bluff, as though I was sick of the house air and wanted to make off.

"Well, I'll take your message over," says I. "There's a Hand at the hellum somewhere," says I. "I reckon on finding that out for sure some day. Meanwhile I'm steerin' the best I know, in the dark. But you take it from me, that it's plumb *in the dark*."

"I won't forget that it's dark, Jim."

My head cleared when I got out on the bay, and steering was all the business in hand for me. I let it go,—that about Mary; the mystery of it. A great, faithful ambition, to reach its hill-height, and then get knocked in the head and stunned in the heart like I knew the case was with Mary.

So many books she had sent to me, to try to lead me on a bit. But I couldn't remember much to the point in them to help just now, except what an old blind man

who sold his writings for a few pounds said once,—to
“Steer right on.”

Sailor or landsman, he had the trick. And, considering the circumstances, his words sang down to me carrying mighty weight with them,

“Nor bate one jot of heart or hope,
But steer right on.”

That old blind man, working away for little or nothing, either of love or money or appreciation, he got the whole voyage down on his chart in just those twelve words.

CHAPTER II

WITHOUT HIS LATCHKEY

SOME time later it was my business to sail a person by the name of Mr. Robert Hilton over from Waldeck to Power Lot.

He was a big, tall, handsome, stylish fellow, and he recognized me as the person who had come to meet him with a grin that sort of mellowed my heart toward him in spite of all I had heard about him.

"Cap'n Turbine, ain't it?" he inquired politely and solicitously—"Cap'n Jim Turbine?"

"Sure."

I got him and his luggage aboard. The boat lay over to a stiff wind and pelted along on her side. My passenger hunched up his richly fur-coated frame as a shield against the wind and attempted to light a cigarette. Any number of times he was baffled by the rude force of the elements, but he showed a hopeful persistence. Patience, too, and a gentlemanly and modified use of cuss words. "Holy thunder!" he exclaimed once, as a blast tipped his hat aside and whistled in his ears. But he only grinned appreciatively at me as the bit of paper clinched between his lips went out in blackness again. He fumbled meditatively in his vest pocket in a vague searching for something that was not there.

"Gad! they've cribbed my latchkey too, blame take 'em!" he said with reproachful sorrow.

He could talk pretty straight, though there was an atmosphere about him as of one pickled, and quite long pickled, with grog, and as if he had, moreover, taken a fresh exhaustive turn at the fountain just before embarking.

"What is there in it, up here on this blame Peary exp'dition, huntin' up 'xplorers' remains 'round the north pole, to reform *me*, eh?" he inquired confidentially.

"Say, you better ask me something easier," said I.

"So I will," he responded obediently. "I'm from New York, Cap'n Turbine—been four days an' nights by rail gettin' to that little station back there—didn't know there was such a place as this within four days o' New York—never dreamed o' such a thing—very fine country, Cap'n—very fine sea view scenery—hic—" said he, humping himself down in complete oblivion of the ocean sublimities spread wide before him—"but New York's a great place too, Cap'n Turbine—great place, New York."

"You wish you were back there right now, don't you?" I called to him cheerfully, for after all there was something pretty brave about him.

"I do," said he, solemnly and confidingly, reaching out his hand to me. "I do, Cap'n."

He seemed to be thinking of laying himself by for a prolonged nap, so I tried a bracer of a question on him. I didn't want, just for his own sake, to bring him into port like so much sack-goods.

"Say, are you a specimen of New York young men

generally?" I shouted at him through the wind. "Hear what I say?"

His eyes glinted, like the eyes of a gentleman who condones ill behavior from one naturally boorish and benighted.

"I am not," he said.

"Still," said I, shouting another bracer at him, "I guess you had company enough so as you didn't get lonesome, eh?"

He ignored me for the thoughts of the past that swept over him. They were plain to see on his face, and brought a pang that righted him a bit. His face was sadder to see in that haggard despair because its natural expression was as sunny as any ever I've seen in this vale of tears. So I watched that suddenly old, sad face, wishing that I had a morsel by way of comfort for him and knowing all the time that what he needed, if he was going to come into port on his legs, was a bracer, and still a bracer, and again a bracer.

"Wake up!" I called. "Can't you answer a man's question?"

Deliberately he lifted his head that had been bowed on his hands, and his blue eyes still condoned me and my ignorant offenses of speech and manner. He smiled at me kindly, pathetically.

"Jim—Cap'n Turbine," said he, "I've had too much latchkey, firs' an' las', un'stan'? I say," he repeated impressively, pointing his finger at me,—“do you un'erstan' that remark?"

He had taken command of the whole situation with his fixed gaze and uplifted finger, and I thought it best to let him stay on top and get interested if he could.

"Yes, sir," I replied meekly, "I understand."

"I had two frien's—always with me—us three—always together—we three—same size as me—same age as I—fine boys—great boys, Dick an' Charlie,—an' they're dead, Jim. So young, both of 'em, all of us,—an' they're gone, Jim.—*Too much latchkey.*"

"Swallow 'em?" I asked, looking at him eagerly, with open mouth.

He shook his head, smiling sickly, but the necessity of superintending my ignorance on toward some light kept him awake, and he straightened himself with a desperate effort.

"Let me 'xplain to you, Jim," said he, renewing his solemn gaze. When I was a little shaver, my father said to me, 'Rob, when you're sixteen years old you shall have latchkey too,' he said. Latchkey—son of millionaire—New York City—means—hic—pretty good time. Not swallowin' latchkey, no, Jim—but havin' pretty good time."

"Couldn't you 'a' used it decent?"

"I could, Jim," said my informer, still in his superior monitory fashion, "but I didn't."

I knew his story already. I was not taking him off his guard, but I'd got to keep him awake telling it, himself.

Tears had come to his eyes at the thought of "Dick and Charlie," and in speaking his father's name. Above all just now he felt that he had to overcome my ignorance and stupidity, and he nerved himself heroically for the task.

"Lis'n, Jim! Latchkey—New York—feller like me—father, mother, dead,—big house—all your own way

—nice fellers for your frien's—means—hic—means—two o'clock in the mornin', Jim."

He smiled indulgently, and gave evidences of sinking off into repose.

"Now, *you* listen," I cried, "*you* listen to *me*!"

His look of supreme forbearance changed to an ugly darkening of the eyes as I went on; but he grew alert.

"One fine day"—I shouted at him from the helm, through the roar of wind and wave—"one fine day, about noon, as usual, you were stretching and yawning on your soft bed preliminary to getting up, but when you tried to get up you found you couldn't. You found your legs wouldn't hold you. That was a beautiful room where you lay staring for a minute straight at the ceiling, with your heart broken, and no wonder, poor lad; but you're all right again now and as fine built a fellow as ever sat slobbering tipsy as a fool in an honest man's boat. But say, that was a beautiful room you had back there in your brown stone house; you had that room frescoed to suit yourself, peaches and grape vines and bunches o' grapes and baskets o' grapes an' bacchanalian figgers flyin' all around the walls an' ceilings——"

"How in thunder, you clodhopper," he bawled back at me, in angry scorn, "do *you* know anything about frescoes an' 'bacchanalian figures'?"

"I got an example right before me," I calls.

"Call this bacchanalian 'round here?" he snorted.

"I call it wild and cold as hell."

"Call it what you like," I challenged him. "I'm going on with my story. I'm a wizard. You didn't know that? Well, you listen. This fine fellow in this

beautiful room, he touches a button at the head of his bed, and a man-servant comes in, and he sends him for the family doctor. That doctor, that cared for his father and mother, has grown to be one of the most famous medical men in that big city, in the world for that matter, and he takes a special interest in this young fellow, by reason of having known and loved his father; and he works over him and stands by him, giving him the most patient, skillful medical aid in the land for weeks together, until this young fellow can walk again. Is there anything familiar in this narration?"

"If you weren't such a boor, I'd knock you down," said he, nostrils quivering and eyes a-glowing black by this time. "People that know anything—don't deal in personalities."

"I'm nothin' but a fly-away wizard of the north," I responded. "Just hear me. This young fellow could walk again. But this good doctor says to him, 'Rob,—whisky and brandy and rum and champagne *and* cigarettes have got to be dropped,' says he, 'and you're young, only twenty-five, your constitution 'll bring you out of this for good and all. *But*, go back to whisky and brandy and rum and champagne *and* cigarettes, the way you been a-doin', ' says he, 'and you'll get foundered again, and next time, neither I nor any other doctor 'll be able to bring you out of it,' says he. Now, Mr. Hilton, did I hear that doctor's warnin' aright as I went flyin' past on my broomstick?"

"D—n you!" says Rob, gritting his teeth, "if you weren't a hairy wild man that never smelled civilization——"

"You pause on interruptin' me," I roared, "or I'll

wipe the deck with ye. Now I got a question to ask ye. Did that young man quit, the way the doctor told him? Did he? Anybody but a lunatic or a coward would 'a' quit. Now, did he quit?"

I had my man on his feet at last. The boat leaped to another wave, and he staggered and lunged over and sat, sick and quiet, huddled in a heap again.

"You listenin' to the magician?" I called. He roused himself, and his angry eyes met mine with sullen hate and contempt. If I could keep him interested a while longer I believed that I could bring him into port on his legs.

"No, no, he didn't quit," says I, loud. There was nobody but Rob and the sea to hear. "Oh, no, he didn't quit. He sat on the fence for a day or two, then he went at it again,—whisky and brandy and rum and champagne *and* cigarettes,—and all his other nice habits. He went into 'em again as hearty and devoted as a hog to its trough. Lord, I couldn't help crying myself as I swep' past on my broomstick. He was such a handsome fellow. In shape and feature the Lord had made him for the heavenly hosts—and all he wanted was a pig sty! Such a generous, patient, fine fellow—a gentleman. What wouldn't I give if I could 'a' had his training? Lord, it doesn't seem to me I'd 'a' thrown it all away."

I was feeling what I said pretty deep, and I set my face to the helm. Rob was silent for some minutes. I did not look his way, but I knew he was awake, studying me.

"Cap'n—" he cleared his throat at last—"Cap'n Turbine?"

"Well?"

"Any fellow that says you're not a gentleman 'll get the size o' my fist. But look here, Cap'n."

"Well?"

"Who told you all that?"

"I guess a gentleman wouldn't tell, would he?"

"No! Fact! He wouldn't tell. Don't you think, though, it was a dirty trick, when I was packed off here to get me away from the past, to go and send all the details of a fellow's record on ahead of him?"

"Nobody knows it, and nobody's going to know it, but Mary and me. You can trust Mary and you can trust me."

"Your wife, Jim?"

"Lord!" said I, and I felt my face burning summer, though it was March out there on the bay.

"Beg your pardon, Jim."

"She's not my wife, and she's not my sweetheart. She's a top-notcher—way beyond me. She's one o' your sort, by education and by nature, though she was born up to Power Lot, God Help Us."

"I haven't any education, Jim. I shirked all that. I've been at the pig-trough, as you say. Haven't even gone in for athletics. Travel—New York—wherever I was—I was mostly with my nose in the trough all the time, Jim. So, 'ceptin' you—and 'Mary'—they won't know about it there where I'm goin'?"

"No."

"When you were flyin' along on your broomstick"—he smiled appreciatively; he seemed to have a mortal weakness for relapsing into good nature—"did they

tell you how they worked it to get me off here, this—hic—hic—unseason'ble time o' year?"

"Something. Yes."

"Said my money—said my fortune was in temp'rary—anyway—'clipse—hic—eclipse, and I got to go to work to earn my bread. You believe that d—n rot?"

"I believe you've got to go to work if you have anything to eat. Yes."

"Do—you—believe"—said he, transfixing me with his solemn look and monitory finger again—"that my fortune's gone into 'clipse?"

"It looks to me as though you were in as desperate a fix as I ever saw a fellow," said I.

He regarded me mournfully, like a child unconvinced but despairing of candor in his subjects.

"It looks t' me," said he, "as though they took 'vantage of a feller's c'ndition to play nasty joke on 'im—doctor—lawyer—business man'ger—all. But I ain't dead yet, Jim. I'll put 'em where they b'long."

It was running in my head what I had heard—the doctor said that it was a case for surgery, of cutting Rob off from his income, his associates, and his latch-key; that decrepitude and death lay quickly waiting for him along the old lines, premature paralysis and untimely death; that his one and only chance for manhood and life itself lay in the application of heroic treatment; lay, in fact, in poverty, deprivation, hardship, *work*. I understood that, when—and if—he got the fiber of a man again physically and morally his worldly fortune would be waiting for him, only augmented by this interregnum in his spendthrift pleasures. Still he kept awake. He was studying me narrowly.

"You seem to know everything. Why didn' they send me 'broad again like a Christian, 'stead o' up here to the end o' Nowhere?"

More bracing for labor here."

"How'd they come to know o' this glash—glashial resort?"

"Well, you see, Mary Stingaree had a classmate that was the daughter of this doctor o' yours. She set the world and all by Mary, got her to go home with her vacations. So the doctor got acquainted with her too; and that's how he arranged for you to rent some o' the Stingaree farm so as you could earn your living."

Rob leaned over and laughed feebly.

"Jim," said he, "how c'n you keep your ol' hearse of a face straight? That's what s'prises me. 'The worl' 's a stage, an' all the men an' women merely players. They have their ex—hic—exi's an' their——' Blame 'em!" he suddenly cried out—"they might 't least 'a' sent my man along with me."

"Your man?"

"My valet, d—n it!"

"Oh, it'll be all you can do to feed *one*. You'll have to scratch like the devil to do that. You won't be able to support any encumbrances up here. But you'll like it. Say, I'll bet a million you'll like it, when you get your sea legs on and get things humming. Why, you're a regular picture o' them old Norsemen I've read about, come down in a straight line,—Olaf—Segul—T'or——"

"T'or be d—d!" said Rob, exceeding bitterly, his head in his hands.

"Why don't ye look about ye?" I cried. "It's

great. It's tremendous. It's worth all the rotten cities in the universe. It's God A'mighty. Just look!"

"I c'n *hear* 'nough of it," he moaned, "without lookin'."

"Oh, come, Rob," said I, "come on, shipmate. Get up on your feet and hold your head in the air. Livin' or dyin', fear nothin' nor nobody, by Cæsar! Say, don't turn ship about now, and run before the gale, like you was afraid. No, sir, you won't do that; you're too big, you're a long sight too brave. Drive her on. Meet the swell, meet the breakers.—Drive her on, to port!"

"Jim," said he, courteously, with a confiding air of bravado, "give 's your hand on it."

CHAPTER III

UP THE HILL

THERE was a curious, and, I felt, an altogether unnecessarily large group down by the shore to meet me on my arrival with my passenger. My comings were usually executed lonely and in silence.

Silent was the group, now, until Rob's tall silk hat began to dawn upon them. He had started from New York with an appropriate paraphernalia of headgear in his hat box,—derby, soft felt, traveling cap, fur cap to match his sealskin overcoat, but he had, perhaps, staked what came most handy in the little games of chance with which he had beguiled the tedious journey; anyway, when I met him he had survived with only this dandy silk hat which now settled down softly, dripping with sea-dew, on the short barber-trained waves of his tawny hair.

The first intimation that the awe on the part of the onlookers was broken came in a running voluntary of giggles from some observant boys.

"Preachin' service next Sunday," said one to his elbow-mate, and showed his broad teeth in hilarity.

"'Tain't a preacher neither," responded seriously the one addressed; "it's a sewin'-machine agent."

"Oh, shet up," said a third. "See them trunks. It's a candy-sample runner, an' a wholesale one too, by gosh!"

As all three watered at the mouth under this conclusion, Rob rose in sickly fashion, surveyed the wet shoals of the beach, rolled up the trousers from his dainty boots displaying some blue silk stockings with pink ornamentations on 'em, a diamond ring on his finger flashing brilliantly as he performed this feat.

Then he touched earth and swaggered unsteadily forward. There must have been some red dye in the silk lining of his hat; it had soaked down coldly on to his cheeks, and there was no question but that he looked theatrical.

The boys grew bolder, and gave the lively steed of their fancy free rein.

"Say, Mister, when does your show open?"

"Say, Mister, which o' them boxes you got the performin' puppies in?"

"I'll show you," said Rob, catching his breath and leaning up against a bowlder,—“I'll show you a' right, one o' these days, boys, what—hic—what box the—hic—the performin' puppies are in.”

His voice was soft and sweet, coming from such a huge bulk. He appeared larger by reason of his coating of seal fur. They knew not that the seal fur might, possibly, be deceptive; that, it might be possible, an angry lion lay tortured in Rob Hilton's breast. His voice was plaintive and sweet, his cheeks ludicrously painted, and he had to lean against a bowlder for support.

"Say," piped one shrill voice, overstepping all bounds, and taking the safeguard of flight as he yelled, "gi' me a free ticket, an' I'll wash yer face for ye."

"Belay thar," bellowed Captain Belcher, driving a

pair of oxen to the front. "Belay thar, you suckers,—he's my man." Captain Belcher advanced toward Rob with outstretched hand. "Ye're welcome, young swell," he roared breezily. "Ye're welcome, Mr.—ahem—Mr. Daisy Lee. Have I named ye by the right handle? How d' do? How d' do?" There was abundant good nature in his voice, unable to quell, however, the promptitude of wit which surged as a fountain within him.

"My name is not 'Lee,' " said Rob surlily.

"No? Wal', we'll get things goin' by the right crank arter a while. Anything 'll do so as it 'll churn the butter, ye know. Ho, ho! Ho, ho!"

The wild shore rang with the buoyant laughter of Captain Belcher and his attendant group.

"It's nice to be smart," said Rob, extremely cynically, from his boulder,—“and so d—d funny.” He kept his hands in his pockets, disdaining the overture of Captain Belcher's great outstretched fist. Captain Belcher eyed him. He was a man of turbulent passions when roused. I waited a bit apprehensively. But Rob had got to fight his own battles. That was part of the day's work. If a man gets too tipsy to stand up for himself, and still takes a sly pull at the bottle whenever he gets a chance, he may as well have his eye-openers come in the natural way. Captain Belcher's regard of the handsome weakling leaning unsteadily against the boulder changed from indignation to contempt. He turned to boisterous action.

"Now then, boys, all together. Let's heave this cargo aboard. The kerridge is at the door." He indicated thus humorously the ox-cart half buried in

the surf, a coarse structure set up on thundrous wheels. "Now boys, all together. Heave 'er up. By the looks o' your dunnage you're reckoning on spendin' some time with us, Mr. Lee."

"Sure, I brought 'nough to change my shirt once 'n while," replied Rob, with meaning, his already nauseated vision fixed unpleasantly on Captain Belcher's soiled "linen."

"That's right. Hope ye'll marry an' settle right down here," retorted the now imperturbable captain. "Sorry I ain't got a closed cab for ye. I was engaged ter haul ye up, an' that 'ar team o' oxen's all I got to show on the road. What d' ye say to it? Don't mind my feelin's—I'm used to havin' 'em hurted."

"Did you make it y'rself?" queried Rob, contemplating the grotesque equipage with plausible curiosity.

"I made the cart, Mr. Lee. One whose name I always mentions with awe made the oxen."

A joyful laugh went up all around Rob.

"Say, Belcher," inquired one, eagerly, "ye go'n' ter haul 'em up Joggins, or the steep way?"

"I'm goin' up the steep way," replied Captain Belcher without hesitation, thoughtfully eliminating a strain from his quid of tobacco. "My oxen has jest been calked, they'll scrabble to it, I reckon; an' perhaps the view 'll kind o' wake up Daisy, here. He'll be glad he come, I bet, when he sees what a view we got. We got a view, by Tar, to knock the Alps endways. All aboard, Mr. Lee. My fagan, here, 'll only carry one passenger aside the trunks, an' you're that passenger by birth, eddication, an' good looks. Ef I'd only been born to ride instead o' walk! When I'm in a

boat I git a chanct to set down an' ride, but ol' mother earth has allus called on me to hoof it. Git aboard."

"I fancy I'll walk, too," said Rob, lurching forward—but he could not. With the long sail and the bleak chill of the wind added to his potations,—he could not.

"Heave, ho. Heave yerself up thar 'longside yer stowage," commanded Captain Belcher cheerfully, in a bellow that seemed to cow the very elements. "Set down on that balk of timber I've laid for ye athwart the gun'els o' the cart. Thar now. Feel yer moorin's? We'll warp ye up to Power Lot, God Help Us, somehow. Gee, haw! Giddup, Buck. Giddup, Bill. Giddup." A resonant crack of his whip started the procession. The "balk of timber" was securely held in place by the trunks, which were chained to the floor and cross-beams of the cart. The cart itself bore evidence of having served recently as a loud instrument in the purveying of guano. Rob rolled up his trousers still higher and gathered his garments close about him.

"He's reefin' all but his jib," commented an on-looker.

"Say, watch him wrop himself up in his fur polinay," exclaimed a delighted boy, with breezy directness.

Rob had a way usually of carrying himself at ease. He sat, gnawing his mustache, remotely sad, in spite of the animated group surrounding the cart.

"Does all this—rabble—belong where I'm goin'?" he inquired presently, with sour emphasis.

"No," responded Captain Belcher; "but events has so transpired as ter bring about a picnic for 'em early in the season this year, an' these 'ere innercent monkeys, blame' ef they ain't takin' advantage of it."

"I s'pose there's no way 'round here of making people mind their own business?" Rob flashed a look of hate at his blowsy following.

"Mebby. Mebby," said Captain Belcher reflectively: "that's somethin' ye'll have ter 'tend to when ye can stand on yer own pins, Daisy. Meanwhiles—it's my 'dvice—you jest take what comes, without callin' no more 'tention to yerself 'n you can help. Tell ye the plain truth, ye're more conspikorous anyway 'n what I reckoned on when I agreed ter haul ye up the hill."

"Shut your mouth," suddenly cried Rob, doubling his fists.

"'Tain't safe," Captain Belcher roared back at him pleasantly. "Tell ye, 'tain't safe. Let me shet my mouth, an' these 'ere oxen'd balk an' back, mebby; an' *them* an' you'd roll back'ards down into—why, jest look back o' ye! Gee, Buck. Gee thar. Whar in doom ye goin' to? Giddup. Giddup." An alarming mandate of the whip exploded in Rob's ears, as he turned.

He shivered at the stupendous scene spread below him, and turned his head quickly again only to meet the awful upward vista of the steeps on which he hung poised. His heart sickened, his very flesh crawled inwardly.

"Sure the stick that holds your beasts on to this cart is firm?" He spoke very meekly.

"By the holy Sewin'-Circle, I hope so!" bawled Captain Belcher bluffly. "I was haulin' a mess o' women up the hill onct with this 'ere same cart an' tackle, when the thole-pin broke, and by the Great Mothers' Meetin', of all the jumpin' out! Don't you

never tell me wimmen ain't qualified to jump. Don't say a word. I ain't seen jumpin' before nor since. Giddup, Buck. What in doom *you* balkin' for? Giddup."

A sensation of horrible dizziness was coming over Rob. He dared not look behind him again.

"Most hills out in the country wind around more, and have some level breathing places," he suggested faintly.

"I wish 't you'd brought some o' that kind along with ye," blustered Captain Belcher. "This 'ere old hill has been foun' fault with, an' brought up in town-meetin', an' condemned, an'——"

"Stop your cart," gasped Rob,—“I'm cold—I want to walk.”

"Stop my cart here—Daisy? Not unless 't you want ter start fresh an' go back'ards."

Rob leaped wildly over his boxes, and sprang to earth, sprawling. The color slowly throbbled back to his cheeks as he rose. He gave a blissful sigh.

"Walkin' 's good enough for me," he asserted to his staring attendants. He seemed inclined to be friendly, like one suddenly rescued from fearful peril.

"Say," he went on conversationally; "that was awful. Say, boys, I wouldn't get into that cart an' ride up this hill again for a thousand dollars. No—by cricky, I wouldn't for ten thousand."

"Pooh," said one bright-eyed lad, of stringy, leathery frame; "what 'll ye give me ter ride up?"

Rob had become genial. He fumbled in his pockets and drew out some silver. The lad leaped blithely over the cart wheels to the summit of the trunks, balanced



"STOP YOUR CART," GASPED ROB, "I'M COLD—I WANT TO WALK."

himself on one foot, and thus derisively accosted the giddy pitch of the hill before him:

"Oh, my! I'm afraid of ye. Oh, don't ye look steep! Oh, my! Guess the oxen 'll sure git stuck on this 'ere hummock I'm comin' to, an' fall down an' go back'ards, an' me an' the cart an' oxen go roll—rollity, bump-bumpity—oh, my! Guess I'll turn 'round an' see where we'll go to."

He swung around with a flourish, poised himself on the other foot to meet the emergencies of the incline and waved his dirty little paw with a comprehensiveness that smacked of contempt toward the distant Bay of Fundy, the nearer Basin, the eastward stretch of river, toward precipice and solemn woods, toward sea and land.

"How d' do?" said he familiarly. "Ye're lookin' fine. Now let's see where I'll go to when me an' the cart an' oxen git going back'ards. We'll slew around an' bounce the fence by Job's pastur', an' then arter we rolled a while we'll make a lap over the school'us' be-frey down there, an' knock the trimmin's off the Baptis' steeple, an'——"

"That'll do, sonny," Rob interrupted, with a pale and weary smile; "you've earned your money. Get down off of that. You make me sick."

Rob had taken off his fur overcoat in an effort to keep up with this climbing company. In spite of the cold wind, the perspiration stood out on his face in heavy drops.

"Is there any top to this business?" he asked, hoarse with weakness, of Captain Belcher.

"Last time I came up this hill, she had a top to 'er,"

replied the captain; "but somethin' may 'a' happened sence. Run on ahead there, some o' you monkeys, an' see ef the top's gone off'n this hill."

"The trees hides it," piped an honest voice. "Thar's a great flat top, an' Power Lot's up thar, too. Say, Mister," continued this white-haired youngster, approaching Rob in all innocence with a bottle held in his hand, "here's somethin' jest dropped outer the pocket o' yer hairy coat."

Rob's face was not capable of a deeper crimson than that it had already assumed through his exertions to keep up with the rest in mounting the hill. He stretched forth his hand, however, with nonchalant nimbleness.

"Doctor's medicine," he explained fatuously—"keep me from takin' cold."

Captain Belcher regarded him with an insidious wink, and cleared his own throat with a bluster of vital soundness. "Seems ter me I got a little tetch o' sore throat comin' on myself," he subjoined. "I reckon you an' me ketch cold kind o' easy, don't we, Mr. Lee? What is yer prescription, thar? Peruny? Cherry Pictorial? Scott's Emulation? Plain Sassaprilly, mebbly?—all the same so long as it's got the force to shoot down mid-channel an' wallop the center o' disease. Let's smell the label."

Rob laughed, and resigned the bottle with quick and generous courtesy.

The captain tasted, and smacked his lips. "Mis' Wunslow's Soothin' Syrup," he remarked judiciously; "jest what I thought. Yes, that was put up by Mis' Wunslow. Ahem. Wal'—Haw, thar, Buck. What you makin' off inter the fir trees for? By Tar an' Bloaters,

you two brute critturs has got ter git to the top o' this hill, an' why in nation don't ye brace to it? Giddup. Giddup."

In the supreme necessity of goading his oxen to endeavor, Captain Belcher had inadvertently consigned the bottle to his own pocket; but his mind presently reverted with undimmed clearness to the subject in hand.

"Ahem, yes, Soothin' Syrup—very—soothiner 'n h—l; but we got a prescription 'round here 't 'll knock the stuffin' outer a cold while that 'ere stuff you're luggin' 'round with ye has ter lay by an' look on in 'stonishment, Mr. Lee."

"'Hilton,' if you please, sir,—not 'Lee,'" said Rob, his lips tightening and the light of manhood suddenly waking in his sweat-begrimed eyes; "and, if you'll remember, it's not I that's 'luggin' the stuff' now. It's *you*."

"Sure," said the cheerful captain, unabashed. "I'm boun' ter call ye 'Hilton' all right, soon as ye worry up ter the top o' this hill. And you're doin' great hoof-work, considerin' the pitch, an' how you ain't use to it. Great! 'T looks ter me as though ye'd make it. An' then me an' these boys air a-goin' ter wave our caps an' *hurray* for Mr. Hiltop—ain't we, boys?"

"'Hilton,' you clown," Rob blurted out, in revengeful distress, his breath coming in short gasps. "'Hilton.'"

"Say, I c'd kick myself"—expostulated Captain Belcher reasonably—"for not havin' no more memory. 'Hilton—Hilton'—Sure. That's it. Now I'm goin' ter lay that away, jest the way it is, along o' the dried

sage an' boneset in my old garret here," he tapped his forehead depreciatively.

"And remember, it's you that's carryin' the 'stuff,'" Rob reminded him, bitterly.

"'Hilton.' Yes. Le' me see, what was I sayin'? Oh, yes—we got a perscription 'round here, that's a wonder-worker on any man what's predersposed to pulmonary affectations. This 'ere perscription—she's a mericle."

"A *what?*" sniffed Rob.

"She's a mericle in her drawin', savin' power, that's what she is. She sucks out the inflermation like a double pad o' Griswol's Ol' Family Salve, that's what she does."

"Well, what is it?" said Rob, as testily as his general contempt and indifference for the subject would allow.

"It's—she's—ahem—she consists of— Giddup thar! giddup! what ye yawin' all over the road for! She consists o' a plow, an' a shovel, an' a spade, an' a hoe, an' other implements, an'inted every half-hour with a gallon er two o' elbow-grease. She's a d—n hard dose ter take. I been a-takin' of her, all my life. But she socks right down ter work an' does the job, every time. She reds ye o' every pulmonary affectation so clean ye wouldn't know ye'd got any pulmonary for affectations ter light on. By the Livin' Wheelbarrow, I know what I'm talkin' about too."

"That's lucky," Rob managed to sneer painfully, his great overcoat sagging on his arm, his spent breath coming in gasps that were almost sobs, as he made another desperate effort to keep up with the procession; "that's lucky, for *I* don't."

"No, ye don't, Mr. Lee—Mr. 'Hilton,' as soon as ye git to the top—I won't forgit my 'ngagements. No, ye don't, but the medicine's waitin' for ye all right, and, as man ter man, I wish ye the pluck ter swaller it without kickin'. 'S I understand it, ye've rented a piece o' the Stingaree land up yander, ter go ter farmin'?"

"I have not," said Rob with apparently dying breath. "I'm going back—to New York—first chance I can get."

"Sho. Wal', brace up," said Captain Belcher, with genuine commiseration, as he surveyed the exhausted victim; "brace up. We're most thar. Mebby now, God A'mighty sent ye, arter all, in some kind o' katty-cornered way ye don't see the lights of, yit." The appeal of Rob's condition may be imagined, to draw forth so tender a flight from the loud and reckless tongue of Captain Belcher. "Say," he continued, "ye think ye been misled about the aspecks an' fertility o' the kentry?"

"I do," sobbed Rob, with an oath.

"Wal', I been sayin' to myself, you're a cur'ous kind o' crittur ter be exploitin' 'round up here for ways ter make yer livin'. Cur'ous. Nothin' o' the kind—that is, not adzackly; no, nor anywheres near it—was ever sprung on us afore. Nothin', I mean, that is, so kind o'—ahem—high-toned—as you prob'ly was—when you started."

"I've had a dirty trick played on me, that's all," muttered Rob.

"Joke, eh?" The captain's red face fairly cracked in a grin of helpless sympathy for those on the other side of the game. "Wal', never mind. You sharpen yer

claws 'round here a spell, so as you c'n raise Time an' Turnover with 'em when you git back. Trick, eh?—Giddup. Giddup.—Here we be. Say, there ain't no view, nor nothin', 'round here, is there?" Captain Belcher himself paused with his oxen for breath at the summit.

"Say, jest cock yer eye off thar to wind'ard," he continued, in that unaccustomed comment upon nature which the presence of a stranger probably incited in him. "Say, ef ye could put a few more oceans an' continents, along with what the' already is a-layin' off thar, it 'ud begin ter size up inter somethin' of an aspeck, eh?"

Rob, still panting, purposely kept his back to the vision, an angry and despairing growl in his eye.

"Perhaps ye'd rather look at things 'round nearer hum'?" suggested the captain. "Wal', that's Mary Stingaree's place off thar, 'tother side the lane."

Rob saw, and turned with an unstified groan to face the terrors of the larger view. He shuddered, and once more turned about.

"Don't feel so down-in-the-mouth," Captain Belcher again entreated him kindly; "it's good pertater land."

"What kind o' land?" Rob echoed, with the now pallid ghost of a sneer.

"Good land f'r raisin' pertaters, ef ye take the foresight ter lay on a top-dressin' o' fish-gurry an'——"

"Spare me the particulars," interposed the fastidious Rob, with a dying snarl. "I'll take your word for it."

"Why, I was jest goin' ter mention"—there was an inflection of chaste dignity and reproach in Captain Belcher's tones—"I was jest goin' ter mention a leetle

kelp, 'r sea-weed, along o' the fish-gurry. Ye ain't so qualmy but what ye c'n hear them mentioned, be ye? I was tryin' ter ding it inter ye, 't a man with any gumption 't all, even ef he had come off the nest kind er half-baked, could cl'ar a hundred dollars a year off'n his pertaters, over 'n above livin' expenses; pervided, of course, 't he don't make a hog o' himself."

"And if he should make a hog of himself?" asked Rob, in confiding satire. The struggle with the hill had cleared his brain, and he spoke with treacherous smoothness.

"Depends entirely," said Captain Belcher faithfully, "on how *much* er a hog he makes er himself."

"Exactly. And if he doesn't make a hog of himself, he clears a hundred dollars a year?"

"Ef the God o' the elements don't thwart him with some queer ructions in the weather line, he does."

"You astonish me."

"I done it accidental, then."

"You fill me with ambition, with hope." There were wild tears, nevertheless, in Rob's eyes. "When does the next boat sail back to Waldeck?"

Captain Belcher shook his head. "Onsartain. Hit or miss. Jest as it happens. Sometime, or no time. Nothin' regular. Sure, we goes fishin' on the Basin, an' a ways out inter the Bay, more or less, 'cordin' to the weather, but take us, by an' large, we're more farm-in' 'n what we use' ter be; an' it's a pecooliar ledgy, murderin', nasty long sail over ter Waldeck. Jim's about the only one 'round here, now, 't associates, reg'lar, along o' the gulls. The wood-packets—they make out, occasional', but the' 's no reckonin' on 'em,

and they're so leaky the eels shins up through their bottoms."

"Where is Jim?"

"That's what we're allus askin'. He's here an' thar—Jim is;—mostly thar."

Laughter hung, open-mouthed, on the visages of the surrounding group.

"Are all this lot, that's tagged me up the hill, going to the house with me?" Rob further complained from the sodden depths of his despair.

"I 'low ye," Captain Belcher responded heartily, "that ain't fair. See here, boys, Mr. Hilton is a-goin', kind er petered-out, an'—ahem—all mussed-up, with his long journey, ter meet a beautiful, highly eddicated young lady, what you knows on, over yander. She knocks the sand all outer me with them eyes o' hern when I got my Sunday rig on. How d' ye suppose Mr. Hilton feels?—all sweaty, an' sick's a cat at the aspecks o' the kentry? Now you git—hum'."

That Captain Belcher was a man of valiance was exemplified by the obedient haste with which the group dispersed, dodging off among the fir trees and bowlders that surrounded the trail of the "Steep Way."

Rob and the captain, and the exceeding noise made by the cart bearing the boxes, progressed toward the Stingaree house; and that, it must be said, with a reluctance on Rob's part that was well-nigh recalcitrant.

"Say, she is a han'some young woman, an' no mistake—Mary Stingaree is." Thus the captain attempted to prod the jaded senses of the being beside him. But Rob had another thought, and its essence was of the lowest dregs of bitterness.

"If you remember," he once more reminded the captain, "it's *you* that's carrying the 'stuff'."

"Don't mention it," shouted Captain Belcher obviously, in a tone of lordly willingness to oblige, but he did not return the bottle to Rob's wistful hand; "don't never mention it. Allus glad ter do ye a favor when I kin. Whoa thar', Buck. Whoa, Bill. I offered to back ye up to the door, but I didn't want ye ter send the cart clean through the house, dang ye."

CHAPTER IV

MARY STINGAREE

MARY tried not to notice how Rob looked. As Captain Belcher said to me afterwards: "Jim," says he, "I was sorry fer 'im. Now don't you discount that one mite. I was sorry fer 'im. I'd almost ruther he'd been silly drunk; the' 's some excuse fer a man lookin' as he done when he's drunk. As it was, when I persented him to Mary, it looked an' appeared ter me as ef I was persentin' somethin' 't lay hard on my stummick as a natteral fool-jackass—an' I wa'n't no ways responsible for him, neither; but thar he was, hitched ter my towline; an' me, as I looked at him, only jest wishin' 't I could have a glass o' plain sody ter git my stummick back whar it was afore I met him."

"Wasn't the pay you got for the job satisfactory, Belcher?" I asked.

"Sure, sure. But no ordinary reckonin's wouldn't apply ter that job. Why, Jim, I took sass from him. Say, I actcherly took sass from the crittur without so much as heavin' a chip at him. An' Mary—she was took in the same way. She turned soft, too."

"What do you say?"

"I say, soon as she looked at Daisy, she 'threw up the rag,' like the wust knocked-out champeen in the ring. She did so. Ma'y Sting'ree 's a woman that's natterally kind o' awesome to a man—leastways, her

eyes gives *me* the creeps. They ain't unhullsomes eyes, but they're too d—n big an' queer for comfort. When she turns 'em full on me, by Cripes, I allus feel as ef I was settin' in the choir facin' the hull congregation, with, mebbby, a rip showin' along the leg o' my britches. I allus face her up squar', but I'm glad when I git away. This is jest between you an' me, Jim. She's a fine young woman."

As a matter of fact, Rob, on entering the Stingaree house, made Mary a very low bow. His haggard eyes were without hope, or any question of hope; but he made his bow—and such a bow as only a fellow with a long line of ornate ancestors knows how to make.

"Yer trunks is too large ter heave thro' the door," Captain Belcher bellowed at him at this juncture. "I'll have ter dump 'em in the shed."

"It's too bad," Mary said, and she blushed; that was all; she made no apology. But she knew civilized conditions of luxury as well as Rob.

The squawking of a hen, rudely roused from her listless dreams of maternal empire by the sudden overturn of trunks in the shed, further animated the meeting between Mary and Rob. As Mary had tried not to notice Rob's appearance, so Rob assumed unconsciousness of the wild racket in close proximity. Though Captain Belcher's unlading fairly shook the house, Rob spoke genteelly:

"The shed will do quite as well, Miss Stingaree. I hope you won't find me troublesome."

"I find you—very welcome," said Mary. "Your room is upstairs to the right. The little front room to the right."

"Thank you, I know I need a tub," murmured Rob as though he wanted to get clean and then die.

Now, an all-over bath at Power Lot—unless, of course, you dipped in the River or the Basin, or swum on the Bay—but an all-over bath in the house at Power Lot meant a considerable stunt in the line of preparation. It meant fetching water by the pailful from the spring and using every kettle available to heat it up on the little stove in the kitchen; then, it meant lugging it upstairs with more water from the spring to make enough of it.

"I heard the crittur say 'tub'," related Captain Belcher afterward, "an' I knew he 'xpected, from sheer force o' habit, ter go into a room full o' v'ilet-smell soap an' towels, an' turn on the fasset, an' then, arter he'd soaked a while, ter let the plug out—an' thar' you be. I'd seen them kind o' bathrooms, onct in a while, in my own day, cruisin' round.

"But now," continued Captain Belcher, "when Daisy Lee says 'tub,' I took a peeper at Mary's face, an' she looked as though she'd run up agin' a cemetery. 'Wouldn't a sponge bath be wiser this evening?' says she, 'you are so tired.' 'No,' says that slob of a Daisy Lee ag'in, with his dyin' genteel voice, 'I'll have a tub.' 'I'll see ter that, Miss Sting'ree,' says I, comin' forwards, an' leavin' my oxen ter loll 'longside the shed. 'I'll see ter that.' An' thinks I ter myself: 'You want a tub, Mis' Daisy, an' I'll git ye a tub—an' be blamed to ye f'r a pesterin' foot-loose pudd'nhead.'

"Say," went on Captain Belcher, "I went ter work. I hove myself down inter the cellar an' sawed off the eend of an old merlasses barrel, an' I rolled 'er upstairs

to Daisy's *boodwar*; an' then I set to, totin' water, an' bilin' of 'er on the stove. 'T made me think f'r all the world o' hog-butcherin'. Don't know why it brung up that to me, 'cept 'twas natterally on account o' luggin an' bilin' so much water. Wal', when that thar 'bath' was all mixed, I says to Daisy, 'Yer tub's all ready,' says I very pleasant an' hopeful; an' me an' the oxen lit out.

"I hope he got clean," concluded Captain Belcher ruminatively. "It 'ud 'a' been a friv'lous fool-junket wastin' water that way, ef it hadn't been so ridick'lous; but f'r that matter, the hull stunt o' haulin' him up thar was as comical as a mess o' tame b'ars. I laffed all the ways home, till these 'ere roundin' sideslats that make up the mainstays o' a man's body-frame was so sore they *squeaked*. Say, I'm givin' that to ye straight—they squeaked audible."

Rob, having previously carried up a portion of his wardrobe from the boxes in the shed, took his bath by the light of a rather ineffectual lamp, his mind dwelling all the time on a foretaste of something which he had brought up concealed in a mass of garments, the very thought of which bloomed as a coming transport within his weary breast.

It was his last, his only, bottle. If he had known the exigencies of the situation he would have brought more. Never mind; he had that. It sustained him through the dingy and unaccustomed trials of his bath. He dressed himself scrupulously in clean linen and broadcloth, then he took a beaker of his one remaining source of comfort and joy, and thus equipped he descended the stairs to meet Mary Stingaree.

A short bustling woman had come over from a neighboring house to help Mary get supper on this occasion. As soon as Rob had emerged from his room this palpably officious female began grimly to bring down, pailful by pailful, the dark and forsaken waters of his bath.

"That Belcher," she exclaimed with stiff scorn. "By Jo, I'd like to knock 'im over with his jokes. Ain't you sticky?" she inquired seriously of Rob.

Rob had suddenly become altogether smiling and blissful. "Yes, madam," he agreed politely, "the water was a trifle sti—hic—sticky, I thought, but very sof', very nice sof' water, madam."

Mrs. Byjo—for so she was called by reason of her frequent use of that pure though forceful expletive—Mrs. Byjo looked very hard at Rob, sniffed and sighed with a mighty breath that almost alarmed him. She went over and whispered to Mary. Rob did not mind; his sole aim was to be condescending and agreeable, as well as he knew how under the circumstances.

"I sh'd think," he said with great delicacy and friendliness, as the roar of the wind outside smote his now placid ear, "I sh'd think your beautiful little homesteads up here'd get blown off, sh'd think they'd get going and blow right off, over on to all 'kingdom-come' off there. Don't see how you make 'em stay, really. Anchored somehow, I suppose?" he concluded smilingly.

"Yes, our houses are anchored all right," replied Mrs. Byjo definitely, "and they're not 'beautiful homesteads'; they're poor old shacks in one way and another, and we know it." She shut her lips with an

ominous gravity that portended sorrow; but Rob went on:

“Doesn’t the wind *ever* stop blowing ’round here?”

“It does,” answered Mrs. Byjo, “when its work is done. Sometimes it has to tear ’round till it’s blown a little common sense into some intellecks that nothing but a tornado ’ll have any effect on. In them cases it has to blow long and blow strong, and turn and overturn.”

“Gee,” said Rob amiably, letting a whistling breath of polite surprise through his white teeth.

“It blows,” continued Mrs. Byjo, “until them that has been raised soft and fearful on the milk o’ one cow, as the sayin’ is, gets so that they can forage up a living on any kind o’ crusts and porridge they can lay their hand to, and be glad of it; yes, and be the better for it, too.”

“I sh’d think prob’ly *you* were the schoolteacher ’round here,” intimated Rob ingratiatingly; “I always like the school teacher in a rural play, I do—always fall in love with ’em. I sh’d think——”

“You set down here till you can think o’ something more to the purpose,” said Mrs. Byjo shortly, plumping a chair down before him. “I’m a woman over forty. An you—ain’t you proud that you’re goin’ on ten? But you’re a thoughtful boy, that’s plain to see, you’re always ‘thinkin’. Now you set down there and ‘think’ what kind of a condition you’re in to meet ladies, whilst we go on getting supper.”

What Rob thought was that he had fallen among exceedingly ill-bred people in grotesquely sordid surroundings. He had tried to mitigate their state by

overlooking their poverty and ignorance with genial good-will, and instead of appreciating it they took advantage of his good nature to make a butt of him. Very well—he mused darkly—he would show his breeding through all. A gentleman could not do otherwise. But his lip curled and his beautiful eyes, hollowed by fatigue and dissipation, glowed sullenly.

He watched the women get supper. Mary's face was very sad. She was strikingly handsome, in a far-off foreign way. But she—who was, in fact, a trifle younger than Rob—looked very old to him. She and Mrs. Byjo appeared to him to be about of an age. He wished heartily that there might be some young and sparkling life about him at that moment, and he sighed.

Mrs. Byjo cast a hopeful glance at him, but Mary had had deep experience of cases of similar ailment in her own household, and she knew that Rob's mind was simply becoming very groggy. She made a cup of strong coffee and brought it to him with her own hand.

“Take this before your supper,” she said; “you must be utterly fatigued.”

Rob rose uncertainly, and, with one hand seeking support from the back of his chair, he bowed his thanks as he accepted the draught.

“Some young men who have had wealth,” said Mary, in her low deliberate voice that smacked so of indifference it tended to rouse him, “enjoy camping out and an occasional return to primitive conditions. Whether you are one of that kind or not, you will find that it is practically ‘camping out’ here, and the primitive necessity of inventing resources for existence.”

Rob gulped down the coffee gratefully, though he remained courteously on his feet.

"New York City 's good 'nough for me." He then smiled at her vaguely. "Tell you the truth, Miss Sting'ree, when I go to th' country, I like—good hotel—and some 'musement. You look 's though you'd seen bet—better days yourself," he added more boldly, but his manner was, somehow, inoffensive. "Tell you the truth—only thing this place is fit for—is grave stones—and I wish I had mine."

"Are you sure you're not something of a coward?" There was fire, as well as kindness, in the dark eyes at which he gazed for a moment steadily. He fancied there was a smile in them, too; he endeavored desperately to ascertain that important fact through his fixed stare. Then his contemplation drifted waveringly to a graying lock or two that shone, so early, in the black hair on her temples.

Mary blushed. She knew that her face and figure were superb. That premature tint of gray was a little thorn, even to her high mind.

"Robert," she said, accepting quietly the supposition of superior years, while a faint smile touched her lips, "I shall call you 'Robert'—being so much older than you—but I prefer that you should call me 'Miss Stingaree,'—never forget that,—my poor mother will never walk again until she has reached the 'place of graves.' She has been waiting to meet you: a new voice and presence are so much to one afflicted as she is. She cannot *see* you. Do you mind going in to speak just a word to her?"

"Why, certainly," said Rob, absorbing the last of

the virile potation in his coffee cup. "Certainly, Miss Sting'ree. D'lighted."

Mary opened the door from the kitchen—which was sitting-room and dining-room also—into a bedroom adjoining.

"Here is Robert Hilton, Mother."

"Come here, Robert Hilton, let me *look* at you," said the sightless old woman, from where she sat propped up in bed. She had an eager air of expectancy.

"Mother has been talking all day of your coming," said Mary.

"Let me take a good long look at you, Robert Hilton," exclaimed Mrs. Stingaree. She seemed to study his face with her large unseeing eyes, brilliant in their natural coloring, while the touch of her pale hand reminded him disagreeably of the tingling of an electric battery. Rob hung his head and cast down his own eyes in extreme discomfort.

"He is noble, noble," finally declared the blind woman to Mary's passive amusement, and Rob's unspeakable amaze. "Have you put on Aunt Taylor Fleming's teacup for him, Mary, and my Tower spoon? You haven't half set the table, I'll warrant. Bring out the best things, girl. Have it fine, girl—fine. Will you ever come in to see me, I wonder?" she said pettishly, turning to Rob; "they all run away from me."

The clear annunciation of the "noble" was still ringing in Rob's befuddled ears. His physical being revolted at the uncanny prospect of another entrance there; but "noble," "noble," pealed charmingly through his soporific senses.

"Cert'nly, madam, I'll come in to see you with

greatest pleasure, if you'll allow me. Pleasure 's all on my side, madam, I 'ssure you."

"Noble," once more muttered the old woman, her brief moment of energy fading into a vague relapse.

"Now, just a moment—do you mind?—will you come and see my brother?" said Mary.

"All these s'prises—I fancy you're tryin' to get me able to stan' on my feet 'fore we go to dinner," murmured Rob confidently, already childishly convinced that deceit or any affectation of it might as well be laid by, as a vain and useless garment, before Mary Stingaree's all-discerning eyes. "'S that so, Miss Sting'ree? All these s'prises?" and he laughed feebly and approvingly.

Mary led the way to a little alcove, which still further revealed the possibilities of the "kitchen." There, on a lounge half concealed behind a door, lay a form, hitherto unsuspected of Rob, considering his own state and the gruesomeness of these altogether novel surroundings.

"This is my brother Bate," Mary said. "He has been on a 'spree.'" She spoke in a matter-of-fact tone. Rob turned to her with a sharp look. Her face was inscrutable. "He is only twenty-seven—and a poor unshaven, besotted wreck of a man, as you see, dead drunk."

"Where—where did he get it, do you suppose?" said Rob, with innocent cunning.

Mary smiled wanly. "I wonder," she said, "if you would help me try to save Bate?"

Rob's views on this subject were altogether too hazy and confused to admit of framing any intelligible reply.

He waited uneasily, his eye wandering toward that part of the kitchen where Mrs. Byjo was stalking about forcefully among the pans and kettles.

"Yes, we will go and have some supper," said Mary; but she still stood for a moment close at her brother's side. There was a singular witchery of compelling power about her, not attractive to Rob, but effective, nevertheless; where she looked he felt constrained to look. So he let his eye wander cursorily again over the lamentable figure on the lounge. "He was such a handsome lad," the sister said. Rob felt that he must look at *her*, and following the voiceless behest, he did look up and met those uncomfortably thrilling eyes again.

"I expect help of *you*," she said quietly, "and not an added care and sorrow. I have all that I can do and bear. You will see that. This is all unnecessary to say, however. You are a gentleman born, and a gentleman does not inflict added burden and trouble upon an already overburdened woman."

The concise, cool voice stung through Rob's senses. It also painted a picture before him in vivid, ineffaceable colors. Whatever he thought, whatever he did, the picture lasted. That was Mary's power.

"I am depending upon you," she added gently, moving away with him.

Rob wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Oh, h—l," he sighed deeply.

Mrs. Byjo offered no weak solace to his straits. She unrolled her sleeves and buttoned them at the wrist, but her manner was rather as though she rolled them up, and that to do battle.

"You will stay and take tea with us, Virginia?" Mary pleaded.

"No, Ma'y, I can't. My oxen ain't unyoked, and my cows are bawling away, over thar', with stuck udders. I'll come over when I've done my chores, and keep ye company if ye want me to. Don't blame ye for not liking to be left alone, considerin' how ye're fixed."

Her words contributed much that was frankly unflattering to Mary's newly acquired guest, but Rob simply gazed at her in amaze. It appeared to him that Mary Stingaree was trying to persuade her cook to sit down at the table with her.

"I hoped," continued Mrs. Byjo, "that Jim Turbine would come up and look out for ye this evening, but he's hawking it, off somewhere. I'll be glad to come over and set with ye after I've thrashed around a while at home."

Rob inferred that some frailty, or lack of cordiality on his part, had prevented Mary having the pleasure of her rude servant to dine with her.

"Take my chair, Cook," he cried elaborately yielding his place. "I'll go get another chair. All sit together. D'lighted."

Mrs. Byjo wore short skirts; her hair was short; her boots declaimed aloud that life was a rough and toilsome journey. She took the oxwhip, which she always carried about with her, from a corner of the room and snapped its lash tentatively. Then she turned to Rob.

"My ancestors were reigning on ducal thrones," she notified him in very correct English, "when yours,

probably, were inventing some new kind of lager beer. Good-night. I'll be over presently, Ma'y."

"She is not my cook," said Mary, as the door closed, "she is my neighbor, who came over to help me out of charity."

Rob was very red. "Excuse me, Miss Sting'ree," said he, "but they're a dev'lish queer sort 'round here. And they don't like me. They been antag—tagonizin' me from the start. I like to be frien'ly. They won't be frien'ly with me."

"You just persevere," Mary encouraged him; for, whatever his ancestry, there was ingrained in him at least one classic tenet of good breeding, not to hurt the feelings of others, and his face was suffused with regret and mortification. Mary's spirits, as a practiced disciplinarian, rose. There was, evidently, "something to get hold of" in Rob's nature.

"There are some queer sorts that you'll find it is only elevating, after all, to make friends with," she went on brightly. "You won't find, the world over, a heart more worthy to win than Virginia Stafford's—sometimes called 'Mrs. Byjo.' And by the way, her line is traceable from the very grandest, and here she is, genuine, away off here in Power Lot with her rough hands and her oxwhip. And there's James Turbine——"

Well, I, who write this, am picking up the glad-somest things that ever befell, along with the rest; and I heard of it, what Mary said about me there before Rob. I don't mind being the kind of fool that I've done it up in blood-tissue, and tied it with my heart-strings, and got it stowed away in the safe-de-

posit vault that I shan't lay down when I shuck off my old body, but take right along with me up yonder—some place they tell of—where the angels sing—So much for that.

Ah, but Rob had the chance—sitting there at the table alone with Mary; and he so broad and tall, above most men, and winsome handsome, and clad in such high fashion; he had the chance to put in a promising lick of courting. He could not even see straight. It crossed his mind that he wished a certain light-footed lady, whom he had frequently met convivially in New York, were opposite him, in the place of “the old maid,” as he mentally denominated Mary Stingaree. Treating him as an inferior, too, with her lofty manner, he soliloquized, maudlin-childish. He wished she might see the dining-room in his own house at home. He tried to recover pride; then stared stupidly at his soup.

That article of diet, always strained, and frequently accentuated with the flavor of wine, amid the niceties of his past existence, and served, too, only as a mere preliminary to his dinner, now appeared to constitute the whole repast, and reeled before him in a conflicting strata of visible onions and carrots. Its odor was wholly seductive, and Rob was greedily hungry. He did not even stop to butter his bread, but drew off one brown slice after another from the plate, and devoured the carrotty stew with a resolute simple devotion to the business in hand.

Mary, for her part, seemed contented with silence, her thoughts adequate to her own entertainment. Rob was grateful for her apparent absent-mindedness and

for the prolonged withdrawal of her disquieting eyes. He had another resolve; to retreat before the arrival of Mrs. Byjo and, also, of that sleep which he already felt creeping in upon him at every pore.

"If you'll excuse me, Miss Sting'ree," he said rising, plainly but fully gorged, "I'll retire, with your p'mission. I'm beas—beas'ly—tired—'pon my word."

Mary handed him a candle. By its small glow he lumbered up the little stairway and turned into his room. At the door-end of his apartment he could stand erect, thereafter the ceiling sloped down into ultimate extinction. There was one chair, a wooden washstand, a bit of a round table, topped by a Bible—and there was his bed.

The one window was wide open. He shivered as he crept up to it. In the moonlight beyond, all the majesty of earth lay stretched before him: loud ocean, priestly heights, vast sleeping forests, strange, omnipotent, appalling—he shrank back with a shudder, only to face again the ignominy and desolation of his room.

"Oh, my God," he almost sobbed. "Penned in this shanty, at the rough end of Nothing and Nowhere. I wonder if they have been fooling me: I wonder if my fortune is really lost." He ground his teeth. "I wish I hadn't been such a d—n fool as not to keep straight 'nough to know what I was about—an' what—what *they* was about. I'll die—die, in this mis-rable place, an' I know it. Well, I'll forget my sor—sorrows, *one* night, anyhow."

He drained his last bottle to the last drop and then threw himself on the bed. "What kind o' mattress is this, I wonder?" He fumbled with drunken curios-

ity. "Straw. Plain long sticks o' straw. Hors— horses usu'ly lay on straw. Nev' mind."

At this point he viewed the matter in a facetious light, and fell asleep with sniggers of intoxicated mirth.

Mary fed her mother the last time for that night: then endeavored, unsuccessfully, to rouse Bate from his bibulous slumbers. The drunken snores of her brother below mingled with the now entirely drunken snores of Rob from above.

The beneficent Mrs. Byjo appeared in due time.

"By Jo, Ma'ry," she said, harkening, "if your cup ain't full. Full o' sots. Well, they're out of mischief for to-night, anyhow."

Mary had finished her housework for the night. She looked weary enough, and pale, but her eyes were not of the sort that faded, they were extremely wide awake. A purpose—a hope to save—burned in them, that made them as if they kept company apart in some realm where heroes wrestle and strive, and mind not death, but only to strive well. Not death, nor even defeat, but only to strive to the utmost; that was the realm she was growing to live in, though she was a proud woman and had trained early for victory. We're usually pretty well toward the west of our life-journey when we don't mind triumph or reward so much as just only to do our work well, and get so absorbed in that business that hopeless tasks, even, take on the garb of certain execution sometime.

Mary—she'd lived a long time in few years, or else the biggest empire of all was *born* in her—to run the race, to fight the battle without flinching, and then to

“call it a day,” and a glad day, and a good one, though it rained from dawn to sunset, with black thunderbolts thrown in. She looked out from her window, too, and drank in the scene, familiar as it was, with an ecstasy of awe; and lingered, as if some Great Soul, out there in the wastes, were offering her unspeakable bread and wine.

CHAPTER V

THE TIDE MAKES IN

A BLEAK misery benumbed Rob, when he awoke next morning. The little old house and its vicinity rattled with all the noises of stirring morning-life on a farm—and the sort of farm, too, where, with all hands from bleating calf to quacking duck, food and joy were sometimes largely a matter of speculation.

Cowbells and dishes, pigs and hens sang together in untrained symphony; and, in visible smoke-wraiths, through the cracks of the door, crept the sturdy atmosphere of frying home-cured ham.

Rob threw off his many-hued bedquilts with disgust, and, as a morning orison, sadly, and with a cunning air of discretion, locked away his empty bottle.

“Mustn’t let the dark-eyed preacher-lady find that,” he said; for he had in general a great notion of making even his speech jolly. “Not till I get away. Going to get away from here to-day somehow; going to start back to New York.”

At the thought his motions took on a more sprightly manner, and he greeted the “dark-eyed preacher-lady” quite cheerfully at breakfast. Her face wore a contented expression, as much as to say: “I believed the gentleman in you would conquer.” So Rob interpreted it, and he rose to the occasion.

Bate, resuscitated, came in from milking and sat

at the table speechlessly. He wore a clean collar, which apology had to condone the rest of his appearance: he seemed entirely satisfied that it did so, troubling himself with nothing save a rapid sour-faced consumption of food. Once only he spoke, and that without looking up, without even the lifting of an eyelash; it was a loud and harsh mandate of reproach to the world at large:

“Pass the butter.”

After breakfast Mary took Rob out to show him his portion of land.

“Of course, as you know, you must plow this,” she said. “The season is early, for this climate. What a glorious day it is! You may have the oxen to use for your plowing this morning.”

Rob made one of his courtliest bows, entirely disposed to put Mary off her guard:

“You are most kind, Miss Stingaree.”

“Do you know how to yoke the oxen to the plow?”

“Oh, certainly, I shall manage with ease. Thanks. Thanks, very much, Miss Stingaree.”

Mary, who was, if the truth must be known, about as pliant and romantic a farmer as Rob himself, went into the house. Rob made a virtuous show of walking toward the barnyard where the oxen stood. He saw Bate, tinkering with real skill and ingenuity, over a gate which the wind had dislodged and broken. Bate did not look up, and Rob marched deliberately out of sight, with the absorbing purpose of counting his money in solitude. He searched his pockets and the contents of his purse with feverish anxiety, for he had an impression—nay, he recalled clearly now the

reckless dissipation which had marked the progress of his overland journey to Waldeck; the night at St. Frederick's especially, where he had stopped to enjoy the jovial companionship of some chance acquaintances, and had spent the night in uproarious drinking and gambling.

He searched himself, therefore, with feverish haste, and stood appalled, open-mouthed, at the result: Two dollars and sixteen cents. The fare alone to New York, without the usual extravagant and luxurious accessories which he employed in traveling, was fifty-five dollars.

Rob researched his pockets, the deep crannies of his folding billbook, the lining of his purse, his huge overcoat pockets, his inner vest pockets: three cigarettes, one match, his handkerchief, his cardcase, and two dollars and sixteen cents; and searching till doomsday could produce no more.

"Lord, what a fool I was." Rob gritted his teeth, struck the match, and almost swallowed the smoke from his cigarette, as a man snatching wildly at his last gasp of elysium.

"Oh, Lord, what a dense fool, *fool, fool*, I've been. Didn't even put in a supply of cigarettes. Nothing to drink, no cigars, no money to light out with—what an ass I must 'a' made o' myself on the way. What an idiotic fool ass? What in h—l 'll I do? What 'll I do? What 'll I do?"

What he did was to make his way desperately down through the woods to the shore, straight for a vessel which some men were loading with wood.

"Fine boat," said Rob critically and ingratiatingly,

putting his hands in his pockets with a nonchalant air, though he was suspiciously out of breath.

"Fine nawthin'," bellowed the familiar voice of Captain Belcher. "She's the contrariest old sucker 't ever run her nozzle through salt water. Durn old suicide. I've a good mind ter let 'er rip next time she goes smellin' 'round for a ledge ter stave 'er ribs into."

"Pshaw, I wish I owned her. She looks very fine to me," said Rob, with truth and diplomacy combined. "I see that her name is 'Leevya Potter.' It's a pretty name. Very."

"She'll *leave ye*, all right," responded Captain Belcher, "she'll leave ye go to pot; oh, she's the 'Leevya Potter,' all right."

The men guffawed in appreciation.

"I think it's too bad to talk that way about a nice boat like that," Rob pursued his devoted way. "Looks to me like first-class wood you're loading there. Going to the States, of course? Looks as though you'd be all ready to sail in an hour or so now?"

The men looked with simple curiosity at this anomaly of an astute New Yorker.

"By Tar an' Bloaters, Daisy Lee," roared Captain Belcher; "why, you're goin' to have the Leevya Potter for a pleasin' dot on the lan'scape fer a long whiles to come. Great Tamarack! she ain't half loaded. We got ter finish our plowin' an' haul thirty cord more o' birch over from Owl's Head, an' make a new main boom an' rudder for 'er afore *she's* ready. Don't you worry about the Leevya Potter, Daisy. She's goin' to look 'purty' to ye an' she's goin' to look 'nice' to ye layin' here on her old eel-trap o' a bottom fer a

long whiles to come. 'Hour or so'!—the Leevya Potter!—— Don't say a word—I got wore out with one circus yisterday, an' I'm tendin' to business to-day strictly."

He directed some wood toward the hold of the Leevya with the energy of a giant and shouted his orders to his men.

Rob longed for the retinue which but a few short days before it had been in his power to call together, to punish and humiliate this coarse offender. The main thing in his consciousness, however, was to get a passage, somehow, back to Waldeck, as his starting place for the journey home. He swallowed his pride, he buried his resentment. It was on his tongue to say: "I will give you the worth of the whole cargo if you'll sail me over to Waldeck station"; but his fingers felt despairingly only the two dollars and sixteen cents in his pocket.

"Wonder," said Rob, in his lion-like pursuance of affability, amid the crash of lading wood, "wonder if there are any smaller boats 'long shore here, as—as seaworthy as this one?"

"Jim's got a top-notch," observed one who spoke, but did not consider the question of consequence enough to turn his head.

"Where is Jim?" Rob called cheerfully amid the din.

"Gone 'round the Gut fishin'."

"Where is the 'Gut'?"

"'Way off yander whar' ye kin jist see the big ledges buttin' out."

"Looks a mile or so away," Rob suggested hopefully.

"The Gut's six mild away."

Rob strolled on. Out of sight of the men, around a bend of the shore, his head drooped.

"Better place to die down here by the water, anyway," he muttered; "not so dizzy."

He sat down on a crystallized spar, leaning over, his head in his hands, watching the incoming tide. After a while he was conscious that two boys had seated themselves silently on two boulders, one on either side of him, intimately close. They were both whittling absorbedly.

The younger one, conscious that Rob was astir, said monotonously, without lifting his eyes from the artistry of his jackknife:

"Kind o' funny, too, the way the tide makes in here, ain't it?"

Rob made no reply. The older boy offered no suggestions. The speaker had not expected a reply; apparently, he was entirely without grudge or disappointment at this lack of recognition of his subject. He whittled on.

After a while the younger boy spake again in the same dispassionate tone:

"Lon Garby trapped a b'ar up back thar' a mild in the woods last night."

He whittled on.

After a long interval, the peace of which was made more profound by the monody of the waves, he said once more:

"Kind o' funny, too, the way the tide makes in here, ain't it?"

Rob spoke, the seething of the brine answering the bitterness of despair in his own soul:

"It is indeed—excruciatingly ludicrous."

Both boys whittled on in the same unperturbed, stolid content. In due time the younger spake again:

"Old man Trawles is courtin' Widder Treet up to Power Lot, God Help Us. Nell an' Gid runs arfter him ter git him home, but he slopes 'round the lots like a fox chasin' arfter a woodchuck—so my folks was tellin'. Mis' Trawles ain't two months in her coffin—so my folks was tellin'."

He whittled on.

"Do you boys know of any way to get over to Waldeck station?" said Rob.

"In all my lifetime," said the younger boy (he was twelve), "in all my lifetime I never yit cruised over t' Waldeck."

He whittled on.

"Once," spake the elder boy, laying aside one finished piece of carving and reaching among a pile of driftwood for further crude material, "once, I went with father to Waldeck. Father hugged shore too clost comin' home, an' we run aground off thar' by Pin'cle Ledge, an' I walked seven mild around the shore home. Father—he waited f'r the tide."

They both whittled.

"Kind o' funny, too," the younger boy mused aloud, and interrogatively, "the way the tide makes in here, ain't it?"

"It surely is jocular to an unprecedented degree," said Rob.

"Twelve hours, makin' and goin'," continued the younger, conscientiously completing his sentimental theme. "Six hours she takes ter ebb out, an' six hours she takes ter make in. Kind o' funny, too——"

"I've already expressed, as well as I know how, my sense of the extreme gleefulness of the business," Rob interrupted, his eyes black and savage with misery.

The boys whittled on, undisturbed and unembittered. The younger spake:

"Got an order f'r a mess o' clams off Ma'y Sting'ree. Guess I'll hike off an' rake 'em up 'fore the tide makes in too fur."

He folded up his knife; laid, unregretfully, the treasures of his patient toil to be swallowed up of the next scamaw on the beach and rose; the older boy followed his example. As informally as they had come they trudged away, around a bend to the flats. Rob was alone again, but not for long.

With a hoe over one shoulder and a bucket of clams weighing down the other slender arm, came Cleota Thibault homeward, singing, along the beach. She had on a blue skirt, a pink waist, a green apron, and a boy's brown soft felt hat; that last was the sorrow of this occasion to the girl, for Cleota had a new Sunday hat, and she loved it with a sort of tender human love; she had stood dandling it that very morning, riven of heart desiring to wear it, even clamming; but prudence had finally conquered, and that of Cleota's own volition, for she had neither mother nor any other female relative to act as guardian over her, poor lass. And now here she was in the old brown felt, and there was the beautiful aristocratic new young man—who had come to Power Lot, God Help Us—disclosed before her on the beach. She ceased her song and made haste to get past unobserved.

Now what Rob noted first in the luminous picture

of health and color which she made against the cold gray of the ocean was the admirable setting afforded by the dull old hat for her bright brown curls, her bright brown eyes, and the glow of her countenance—a living bloom which made the blue skirt, the pink waist, and all the other colors tame in comparison. The young man cleared his sorrowful throat, sighed deeply, and gazed.

Cleota heard the sigh, stole a sidelong glance, and beheld the dreary despair of his attitude. Humanity conquered vanity.

“Don’t you think you’re goin’ to like it over to Power Lot, God Help Us, Mr. Lee? May be you like it better down to Bear River where me—I live?” she added innocently. It was evident that Captain Belcher’s invention of “Daisy Lee” had spread trustfully abroad in Bear River.

“My name is Robert Hilton,” Rob answered drearily, almost with tears in his eyes, while his lip curled with mortification and anger.

Cleota put down her hoe and her bucket of clams.

“You mus’ not mind, Mr. Hilton,” said she, approaching a step or two. “All the folks ’roun’ here—they call other folks them comical names. They call me ‘Cuby’.”

“Why?”

“Wa-a-al,” said she, drawing a serious though delicious adaptation of the common idiom; “wa-a-al, firs’ they did call me ‘Cloves’ for Cleota, then ‘Cinnamon,’ then ‘Allspice,’ an’ sometimes ‘Pepper,’ an’ now they call me ‘Cuby’ for good an’ all, because all them things grows in Cuby, don’t you think?”

"You are tropical in beauty, that is sure. You have so much of it, I mean," said Rob. "What may I call you?"

"Why, of course, I shall call you Mister Hilton, and you call me Miss Thibault. It is pronounce' *Tee-bo*. It is French. My father is French, but me—I am American. I was born to Bear River."

"Bear River was very lucky to have you born to it," asserted Rob, now with genuine warmth. Then the monologue of his thoughts reasserted itself:

"Do you know of any way I could get over to Waldeck, Miss *Tee-bo*?"

Cuby shook her head. In the first place she did not want him to go; in the second place she was fully determined he never should go until he had seen that Sunday hat.

"My father is not a fisherman," she said, tossing her head. "He have no boat. My father has a team of two horses an' a very strong harness, cost him feefty dollar. My father's business is a haulin' wood. Cap'n Jim Turbine—he came to my father to hire him to meet the vessel when she come in, an' haul up you an' them trunks. My father, he would not do so—he like so much better, you see," said Cuby, with blushing apology, "to haul the wood."

She had been constantly drawing nearer to him, with the feminine compassion for, and authority over, a handsome young man in affliction. Now, she sat down on the bowlder where the younger boy had been.

"There—is—no—way?" said Rob slowly, his strained blue eyes looking out to sea.

"You look a' me, Mister Hilton," said Cuby, the

bashful maiden no longer, but suddenly become a guide and monitress under the drift and leveling of circumstance. She shook a small brown finger at him. "You look a' me, an' mind what I say, everything."

Rob turned his wistful eyes to her appealingly.

"You don't like it very well there where you come to live. I do'n' blame you. Ma'y Sting'ree, she's a proud, stuck-up, hotty ol' Baptis', that's what she is."

"I guess you're right," said Rob wonderingly; "what makes her a Baptis'?"

"'Cause she sings so loud in the meet'n. Me—I go to meet'n', but I make myself very still an' very far back in the meet'n'house. The meet'n'house is a holy place," said Cuby, as if speaking by rote, her eyes downcast, her little hand stroking the blue skirt softly.

Rob was entranced.

"You could sing as loud as she if you tried, I bet," he said gracefully; "couldn't you?"

"Wa-a-al, by tam, I ain't sayin' nothin'," replied Cuby, with that utter colloquialism into which she sometimes sweetly and unconsciously relapsed. But her manner left the fact of her musical ability to remain undisputed.

Like a fretful child, Rob's mind again reverted to his woes:

"You don't know of any way, Cuby—dear—for me to get over to Waldeck?"

"Rober', no, I do'n' know any way, an' I think you make yourself a fool to not think o' nothin' but jus' tryin' to get back where you come from. Why don't you be sma-art—*smarrt*, Rober'?"

Robert gazed at her animated face in dismay, and made no reply.

"If I was you I would make the bluff—I would. I would show them how I was *smarrrt—smarrrt!*"

"*You* wouldn't have to make any bluff to show that," said Robert, at attention, for her radiant face was very bewitching.

"Me—I would show them. Now, lis'n—they all lookin' to see you run away or make yourself a fool. I hear them talk, so I know what it is they think. And you, Rober', you are big an' strong an' more good-lookin' as any of them. You jus' make the bluff, go do the farming an' get the money, so then you can go away—if you wish. Make the big bluff, an' be like you was smarrrt."

"I can't get any money farming, Cuby," said Rob altogether despondent. "I don't know how. I, driving those horned beasts up and down that infernal precipice! It makes me sick, even just crawling up an' down there on foot. It's awful, and the house is awful. I wish—I wish I was dead!"

A cold little wind-reddened hand crept over and laid itself for the brief space of an instant on Rob's hand.

"Rober', it's hard for you losin' your fine 'ome what you had, an' all your big pile o' money. But now you min' me, an' all shall be well, I tell you; jus' you make the big bluff."

"Cuby," said Robert, detaining the small hand, and, to make sure of detaining it, he groaned again aloud, "I wish I was dead."

"There's a road—not so steep," said Cuby. "You seen where they loadin' the 'Leevya'?—wa-a-al, over

the other side the River there's another road begins there, an' it goes up to Power Lot, God Help Us, jus' the same, but it winds aroun' and' aroun', a way not near so steep. Now, it is too late to-day, but to-morrow you put on the big bluff an' make mad at everybody, an' go yoke Ma'y Sting'ree's oxen, an' drive them yourself with the big talk what they always talks at oxen; an' you come down here with them an' get some rock-weed for to dress your land. That is the first thing to begin to farm."

"Rock-weed to dress the land. See here, Cuby, I'm having enough to try me without *you* putting me up to any funny business. The blame' old land is too much dressed with 'rocks' and 'weeds' already."

Cuby laughed with merry indulgence. "Me an' my father, we don't know nothin' 'bout farmin', neither; but I see them what they do. They haul up the rock-weed for to spread over the land, and, also, they haul up of the fish-gurry."

"Let them," said Rob; "it makes me sick to think of it. You don't suppose I'm going around accumulating that sort of fragrance on my person, do you? Why, my very boots would smell."

"Aha!" cried Cuby through her laughter, shaking at him a finger sapient with agricultural lore, however accidentally acquired; "but you mus'. If you make not the ground to smell, then you shall have no potatoes. Sure. 'Tis so. My father, he hauls wood an' burns the charcoal—he is no farmer, but I have seen them, what they do. They haul all that makes a rot," admitted Cuby confidentially, and lifting her dainty nose in execration, "an' with it they make the stinkin'

ground. Also, you mus' do so, an' you mus' not mind, for if you have not the stinkin' ground then you shall have no potatoes."

Rob listened in astound and admiration. Her face was as fair as a flower, her teeth were as white as pure linen seven times washed.

"I think I shall take your advice," he considered aloud, "provided you will keep on advising me."

"Sure," said Cuby competently, "I shall always tell you what to do next—and may be you will have good potatoes, an' then they shall not make fun at you."

"Will you show me how to get rock-weed and fish-gurry?" Rob soliloquized audibly, inclining ever to Cuby as the sole point of effulgence left in a cold and dreary world.

"Didn't I tell you, I shall tell you everything you shall do, so they shall not make a laugh at you? But you—you mus' make the big bluff at them—or it shall all be no good." She sighed.

"It won't make people talk unkindly about *you*?" said Rob.

"No, for I am good. Some is bad: about them is talk. But me—no. I am good. My father an' Cap'n Jim Turbine, they tam to hell anybody w'at talk about me," concluded Cuby with placid satisfaction.

"Good," said Rob, "you're all right. I wonder if I could find somebody to take charge of *my* character. Well, never mind. I think you are saving my life and reason. At what time will you be here tomorrow morning to meet me?"

"Nine o'clock. You got to 'ump yourself an' git a move on to make a farm."

"I'm used to sleeping late, but I don't care how soon I get out of that old Samantha-Tildy-Ann bedquilt of a room of mine."

"Ma'y Sting'ree is a nice housekeeper," declared Cuby virtuously.

"She's an old hen of a schoolteacher, that's what she is," replied Rob.

Cuby's heart leaped and she adjudged it safe to experiment still further with the function of justice:

"Ma'y Sting'ree is only twenty-five."

"She has lied about her age, then. She is forty, if she's a day."

Cuby ceased temporizing further in Mary's behalf, and laughed with a joyful sympathy she could not conceal. Rob seemed to her a beautiful young man. There was a cut to his clothes and a general air about him that was foreign and adorable. He had the blue eyes and the fair mustache of that hero in her favorite novel—the one who leaped to the ninth floor of the burning tenement and rescued "Alva," the factory girl, to whom he was secretly betrothed. This romance, Cuby adjudged by all means to be a work of art. Its precepts and its tragedies, of which there was no stint, abided with her. As for Mary Stingaree, Cuby admitted to herself she was a clever woman, learned and superior, and, to the keen instinct of one of her own sex, a dangerously alluring and fascinating woman.

So, when Cuby heard Rob's words, coupled with the frank distaste gleaming in his eyes and curling his lip, she laughed deliciously:

"Rober', you mus' not make the fun at her."

"I wish *you* lived up at Power Lot, Cuby."

"Oh, there is only a short road and the hill."

"It's the deuce of a hill, though."

"You forget me—what I tell you. There is a road not so steep. Now I mus' go 'ome. I should ask you to dinner, but I get no dinner until night. Then my father comes 'ome from a-choppin an' haulin' the wood, an' I get then the dinner. I shall go," said she, rising promptly. "You also mus' go."

"Yes," Rob deplored, "I'll go. You are sure that you will be here when I come to-morrow?"

"May be so an' may be not," flaunted Cuby, pursuing the tantalizing methods of proud Alva of the tenelements. "But, anyway, you shall come."

Rob gallantly took up the bucket of clams and the hoe. Cuby blushed with satisfaction at this approved and elegant consummation of the opening chapter of her romance, and walked unburdened at his side, her head held very erect, health palpably radiating from her as a perfect creation of nature.

"Is there anything like a shop anywhere around here," questioned Rob; "where a fellow could purchase a few cigarettes, I mean?"

"Sure. What for do you take us? There is a store to Bear River."—And to Cuby's mind it comprehended all the variant wants of mankind.—"There it is, off there where you see the team of oxen standin'. Now give to me the clams an' my hoe. I wish you not to go to my 'ouse with me. No—give them to me. You shall be late 'ome; an' Ma'y Sting'ree, she will take her gad-stick from behin' the door"—laughter interrupted Cuby's derision—"an' lick you. What, Rober'?"

"You are cruel, like the rest," said Robert, boyish disappointment and desperation showing on his clear-cut features.

"Not," intimated Cuby, with patronizing tenderness, "not if you make the big bluff."

"Well, give me a kiss to start me bold on that way, Cuby—Cuby, darling."

À la Alva of the tenement-fire, Rob felt a smart slap in his face and awakened to see Cuby disappearing with the hoe and clam bucket, which she had snatched ruthlessly from his now bereft and aching hands. He gazed after her, forsakenly.

"Don' forget to bring rek' an' pitch-a-fork when you come down to-morrow," she called back to him, brightly affectionate, from a distance.

"All right," he responded, with a rebound of hope in his shout. He watched her retreating form—a step elastic, tireless, and graceful.

Rob went in search of the store; entered it with a sense of curiosity and dismay which struck even the hardened case of the proprietor as unflattering.

"I'll take some 'Maud Dancer' cigarettes," said he, jingling the coin in his pocket.

"I ain't got none," replied that authority, without the least accent of regret therefor.

"What kind have you?"

"No kind, an' no segars. No call for 'em. Old X plug's the favorite with my custom. Good for smokin', good for chewin'. Want some?"

"Is there any other store about here?"

"I ain't got time to go out and look," was the entirely sarcastic answer.

"You would know, probably," retorted Rob sternly, straightening himself.

"Sure. I reckon somebody 'd 'a' dropped in an' told me. I'm apt ter git the news in here 's soon 's it drops off the wire."

"Give me some of your 'Old X' then," demanded Rob, throwing a dollar on the counter. The storekeeper counted out the change. Rob drew on a glove before he consigned the greasy silver and pennies to his pocket.

Presently he reappeared.

"Got anything air-tight to put this stuff in?" he inquired, with some sarcasm on his own part.

The storekeeper grinned, and laid a common clay pipe on the counter.

"Have you no other kind?" Rob asked, still severely.

"Nope."

"How much?"

"Cent."

Rob threw the coin down from his gloved hand with disgust and took up the pipe. Presently he again reappeared.

"Give me some matches," he said, crossly tossing some small change on the counter.

"Now you're all right for a smoke, Mr. Lee," said the storekeeper good-naturedly.

Rob drew near the man with a genuine glitter of steel in his eyes. "My name is Hilton," he said, through set teeth.

"Somebody's got ye twisted then; I heern yer name was Lee. Wal', ef ye're like me ye're ready to say 'Call me anythin' but Late to Dinner.' Ho, ho!

Ha, ha! Wal', come in ag'in, Mister Hilton, come in ag'in."

Rob labored up the hill homeward, perspiring and panting.

"This is infernal," he gasped, his overcoat on his arm, the sweat streaming from every pore of his body. "When I get up to the top I'll probably strike a wind as cold and stiff as Labrador. There isn't a level foot along here for a fellow to stop and get his wind. I'll get over there into the ditch and brace myself against a bowlder a minute, and see if I can start a fire on this nasty apology for a smoke."

Rob filled the clay pipe and, with considerable difficulty, lighted it. The taste seemed to give him an extensive field for nauseous speculation.

"It's molasses and ginger," he said. "No, it's molasses and onions. The only thing there *ain't* in it is tobacco. Phew," he complained, "and I have to draw on it like a suction pump, at that. Well, such as it is, I'm glad it don't come any easier. Molasses and—call it molasses and Cuby. It's got all kinds of flavorin'—exceptin' tobacco."

But at the name of "Cuby," a more hopeful expression flitted over the young man's face. He continued the ascent of the hill, appearing at the summit with the hopeful sign, at least, of a discarded overcoat, and a wise clay pipe that gave back but little molasses and ginger for much strenuous pulling.

CHAPTER VI

TWENTY CENTS AN HOUR

MARY STINGAREE had been reinforced beforehand as to the methods it would be necessary to pursue with that spoiled son of fortune, Robert Hilton. Mary had not sought, nor craved, the disagreeable task; it having been imposed upon her, she stood up to it bravely, and, as was her nature, unfalteringly.

"Of course, you wish to work to pay your board, until you can earn some money of your own for that purpose," she said to Rob. "We will be business-like about it. Your board will be three dollars a week. Your labor, though you are inexperienced, we will call worth twenty cents an hour. That is the lowest price for board and the highest rate for labor ever paid about here. I wish that you could get in a couple of hours' work on the woodpile this very afternoon. Bate was away so long, the woodpile, as you can see, is getting very low."

Rob's astonishment gave place on the instant to burning inward wrath. The earth had been his, and the fullness thereof. People were fed, and extravagantly fed—and wine too—as a matter-of-course. The idea that he must pay for a paltry dinner of beans and coarse bread by actual manual labor was so startling as to plunge him, in his own estimation, to a fatal fall among the scum and outcast of creation. It gave a

rigid and exacting tone to existence which his very soul abhorred.

He hated Mary Stingaree as the means used to compel him to this ignominy. For—it flashed over him—he could not, of course, let a woman—who was of no kin to him, at that—confessedly put the bread of charity into his mouth.

Moreover, Rob was growing irritable from the unusual deprivation he was suffering from having no strong drink at his command. It was a fierce dilemma for him—a craving that began to possess him, blindly, madly. And unreasoningly now, one thought made a glowing focus for his distemper—he hated Mary Stingaree.

Mary, apparently, was too much preoccupied to perceive either his dislike or his displeasure.

“The ax and saw are out there by the woodpile,” she said brightly and encouragingly, and turned to continue her own work in the house.

Rob, pulling away at his unsatisfactory pipe, sauntered malignantly to the woodpile and stood with his hands in his pockets, like a child making a flamingo-show of independence.

Then, from a wild desire to forget his misery and his thirst, he began to saw. The saw went flat, sideways, reeled like a drunken man. Fear of ridicule added to Rob’s wrath, for he was in full view of the house windows and the whole surrounding hamlet. He laid down his pipe, put off his overcoat,—put off, presently, his very coat, and clenched his teeth in a desperate struggle with this unwieldy subject. He smothered his gasps, he ignored his aching back; the sweat ran from

his wet hair down his face; he even felt a drop fall now and then on his blistering, swollen hands. When he did lift his head occasionally, willfully unconscious that his mortal frame was really a pathetic spectacle of red and wilted exhaustion, he whistled.

In spite of all—and it was, indeed, his utmost—the pile of sawn wood seemed to increase but exceeding slowly. And he had meant to dawdle down to the shore again that afternoon, not to hide himself in melancholy contemplation on a spar, but to stand out conspicuously against the bluffs as a possible target for the approach of beautiful, gay-colored Cuby Tee-bo.

“Old Fly-by-Night,” said Rob, many times, under his breath, not of sweet Cuby, but of that other woman, who, with her bright regal eyes pondering many things, was singing unconsciously as she washed the dishes, “tidied up,” tended her poor mother, and set about preparing the chowder for supper.

Bate left his plow in the adjoining field to come over to the spring for a drink of water. He paused a moment at Rob’s shoulder, even his morose nature affected by the moving spectacle of that young man’s perspiring pains.

“Say, you look beat out,” he volunteered in growling sympathy.

“Nonsense,” panted Rob; “the wind has changed, that’s all. It’s turned as hot as Tophet.”

“No, the wind ain’t shifted neither,” replied Bate, very literally; “it’s you.”

Rob had seen him drink at the spring and he could bear it no longer. He marched over and fed at that pellucid fountain, deep and long. When he returned

Bate was still standing by the little pile of sawn wood contemplating it with judicial pity and wonder.

"Say, ye done a smart little job—considerin'," said he. "I never seen a man work so mad an' peggy." The main thing now, however, with Rob was that his thirst instantly returned. It seemed utter, insatiable.

"Look here, Bate," said he in a low tone, doggedly picking up his saw, "do you know of any place 'round here where a fellow could get a little nip o' something besides air to drink?"

Bate turned his back completely to the house, looked straight toward the horizon, and grumbled uneasily, "How do I know but what you'd go an' give us away?"—his own thirst was keen, though, and he was penniless—"sometimes—I don' know—when some stranger-body comes in shore, they mo'nt have a little somethin' an' they mo'nt not. I mo'nt wander over somewhar's to-night an' see."

"I'll share it even with you if you will," said Rob.

"Got any money?" muttered Bate.

Rob thrust his hand rapidly in his pocket.

"'S—sh," Bate breathed warningly—"go easy. Don't let Ma'y see ye fishin' for money whilst we're standin' talkin' together."

But the warning was too late. Before Rob could withdraw his hand from his pocket he realized that his hat had been knocked from his head by some individual in the rear and a stinging blow administered to one cheek. Bate's hat flew off, too, and a whack even lustier smote him.

"Take that, by Jo! you cheese-heads," cried a confident voice.

Up to this time Rob, dazed and marveling, had fancied the aggressor to be Mary Stingaree, but he turned to confront a short, stout woman, wearing a man's hat, and a general manner that was the culmination of dauntlessness.

"Don't you jump at me again," said the incensed and marveling Rob.

"'Jump at you,'" sniffed the woman. "I wouldn't take you as a gift, by Jo!—not with a thousand acres thrown in."

Rob stooped, picked up his hat, and brushed it angrily.

"Get out o' here," he said to the queer woman.

She laughed, switched around an oxwhip that she had been holding in her left hand, raised it, and cracked the lash in the air with ringing exuberance.

"You measly little puppies," she cried, "out here arrangin' to make a pair o' selfish dung-hill swine o' yerselves, with Mary Stingaree, in there, that's given up her dearest hopes in life to come home and take care of her mother and you!"

Mrs. Byjo caught her valiant breath, and continued:

"She was depending on you, Bate, to help this other feller, and you know it, you hog; and she was depending on this other soft squish of a fool to help you along, and you both know it. And you'll set your lazy good-for-nothing carkisses down on that poor young woman for dependence, and tear the heart out o' her with your mean brute ways. A dog is away beyond ye, in heart and intellect both, by Jo! Look at yerselves! Ain't ye proud? Think yerselves over a little, ye measly lard-drippin's. Or, if ye can't stand it to do that—and I

don't see how ye can—think o' Mary Stingaree an' the human beings 'round ye, and try to waddle out o' yer sty and act as though ye'd been born with souls along o' other folks."

Rob took up his saw.

"Madam," said he with a bow and a derisive snarl through his white teeth, "you'd make a good one for a rural play—you would. Let me escort you over to New York and I will promise you crowded houses."

She stood with arms akimbo, regarding him, neither hurt nor hate on her face, but a contempt that was terribly genuine, and quite at rest.

"I've got all the audience I want, right here," she replied. "I ain't no hand for 'crowded houses.' Two villains at a time is enough for me."

"Thank you, madam."

"You'll have more than that to thank me for. Just you go yourself or send poor Bate Stingaree anywhere to git rum for ye, and, by Jo! me or Jim Turbine, or both of us together, 'll whip ye till ye squeal for mercy. Am I talkin', Bate?"

"I guess ye be," said Bate wearily, slinking away to his plow.

"Ye heard what Bate said?" The woman looked at Rob with her unromantic, unflashing, common gray eyes.

"Pray don't hasten to leave me, madam," said Rob. "I assure you, I shan't know what to do without your company."

"Don't you fret. I'm goin' to keep an eye on ye, for Mary's sake. Don't ye get to thinkin' that I consider *you* interestin', for I don't. Big as ye be, ye ain't man-size, nowhere near."

She tramped away with her manly, self-confident tread. Rob watched the two sturdy arms swinging and the cant of her hat; saw her in a field not far away wake up her oxen with a crack of her whip, seize the plow handles and bend to her task.

"Well," he ruminated in apostrophe, "ain't this a h—l circus of a place. A fellow 'd make more exporting some of these queer hyenas than he would sweating his gizzard out for a supper of dirty clams and crackers."

Still, in fact, all Mary Stingaree's cooking was very clean, and the thought of it was already tantalizing Rob, not unhopefully. He sawed on, with scorn in his soul for the outlandish and weird community in which fate had placed him. Once in a while he lifted his eyes to the woman over in the field striving manfully over the newly plowed ruts.

"She's a plucky old wildcat, anyhow," he averred.

Bate always went in first and promptly to his meals; at the self-appointed hour he strode in, and, if Mary was not ready, awaited her preparations with impatience. As he passed Rob the latter adroitly slipped some money into his hand.

"Le' me 'lone," said Bate, instantly dropping the money into the chips. "Want to git me into a scrape? Ef you want somethin' ter drink, ye'll have ter light out somewhar's else, f'r all me; that's what I'm goin' ter do soon as I git a chance."

What was it, Rob wondered, of which the fellow was afraid. Afraid of a woman's tongue?—of a woman's whip? Rob let the money lie for a space, only picking it up hastily as he entered the house at the call to supper. Mary saw the act.

Bate ate as usual in surly silence. Mary Stingaree's eyes were more distasteful to Rob than even the thought of the plow-woman's lash. Mary's cheeks were flushed, and she seemed inclined to talk, of her past experiences, of such current events as she had any opportunity to learn; the tone and manner of a lady—a cultivation beyond any circle even that Rob had ever known.

When she willed that he should look at her, the poor wretch was always conscious of it and eventually lifted his head. He did so now and met her eyes; in their despair and sorrow, unconsciously they scourged him. More than that, it struck him for the first time that they were bewilderingly beautiful eyes, that her color was fine, her features entrancing. She looked young this night. He recalled what Cuby had said, that Mary Stingaree was only twenty-five. He stared stupidly at her; for he felt that it mattered little: he was debased in his own eyes and in hers. She knew that he was drink-crazy, that he had attempted to suborn another—an even more pitiful drunkard than himself—to do his besotted will in procuring drink for them both. It was “damnable cruel,” he thought, to have a man's head growing clearer under such circumstances.

To realize by some dull pang outside his own volition the matchless beauty and desirability of a woman who was in the stars out of his reach, utterly and forever; and he, awakened, at such a moment, to find himself lying worthless, broken, and besotted in the lowest ditch of earth.

“Virginia Stafford was in to see me this afternoon,” said Mary conversationally.

“Who?”

"The woman they have nicknamed 'Mrs. Byjo.' She can bear a goodly number of nicknames and of eccentricities," continued Mary, smiling; "she is large enough in nature to stand it."

"You mean that plow-woman?" said Rob dully. The subject did not interest him.

"Yes, I mean the plow-woman"—Mary was not in the least disconcerted. "And by the way, she is the most successful farmer in Power Lot; not that she is accumulating wealth, but—incredible to me, anyway—she is able to send something—something—every six months toward the support of the two orphan children her brother left, back in the States; enough, at least, with the little their father left them, so that they are not made objects of charity. How she does it, I do not know; but she does it. She rises regularly at five. She is indefatigable; she is unconquerable by adversity or misfortune. She could lead an army."

"I like a woman to *be* a woman," said Rob stupidly, and a little crossly. Bate had risen some time before, and left the room with a covert sneer.

"And I," said Mary, very sweetly and clearly, but hitting straight from the shoulder, "I like a man to *be* a man."

Rob flushed violently. The look he met on her face was almost tender, though; it bridged the distance between her and him with a certain grandeur of humility and faith. Rob felt no excuse for anger and no desire to rise in wrath.

"Well, Miss Stingaree," said he sadly, "I expect I deserve that hit all right;" and his mouth worked pitifully.

Yet if the desired cup of his former weakness and quondam destruction had been set before him on that instant he would have drunk of it without hesitation or compunction.

Mary knew. "While I am 'hitting,'" she went on, her eyes conveying their splendid challenge of pity and loyalty—"while I am hitting—my friend Robert,—do you mind if I hit pretty hard?"

"No," sighed the hopeless victim, "I like to have *you* pommel me."

It was the turn for Mary's cheeks to spring aflame. His weakness exasperated her, his sudden subjection disgusted her.

"I could understand, possibly, the recklessness, the madness, of your trying to get drink again for yourself, but to attempt to employ a wreck like my brother for the purpose—that was too perfidious, too craven."

"You don't understand," Rob protested, meeting her look straightway, though the red of shame was deep on his face. "I did not think—I did not mean—perhaps you go by rule and square—then take somebody straighter than I am to prove your measurements by."

"Straighter than you," Mary ejaculated in scorn.

"I don't mean physically," stammered Rob.

"How, then?"

Rob's adventures in metaphysics had been few and far between. He hesitated.

"Did you ever think much, I wonder"—Mary seemed to muse—"of the misfortune, the deformity, the hideous woe actually born into this world to take its human shape and suffer through its whole existence here because of a lack of any fair equipment for life?"

"You see a lot of it in the city," Rob returned, grateful, at least, for the diversion, and now on solid ground; "I've often wondered why—God did it."

He was far from being at ease with her; words would not come to him. He felt as if he were in the backward class in school before her, and his size and opportunities made the position ridiculous. He would have given the world at that moment to be a strong, morally stalwart, masterful man before Mary Stingaree.

"And you tell me that you are of that sort," she sighed; "only morally deficient and deformed, instead of physically. Somehow, I cannot believe it."

In his heart Rob was glad that she could not; his position, however, became increasingly awkward. She was waiting, gently, not in the least imperatively, for an answer; and he was hard put to it to know what to answer.

"There's a great deal in environment, you know," he affirmed lightly, with a high blush.

"Yes, there must be," she said, very slowly and gravely, "to conquer a man of the size that you are both in soul and body."

Rob could not look at her now; his heart gave a tumultuous leap, tears sprang to his eyes. She had reinstated him over the waste of lost ideals and a squandered life. Did she mean it? Yes, she meant it—his soul averred—for she seemed to dislike him personally; she would not flatter him. The soothing words seemed almost to have been spoken against her will.

Let her say what she might about him therefore, let her shrink from him as she might—he loved her, he adored her—the thought suffused him—he could not

look at her. But his shoulders straightened, the boyish laugh came crisply through his white teeth.

"I guess it might be that the fault lies pretty much—with Rob Hilton," he admitted; "it might be that he's a fellow that's been—damnably thoughtless and—self-indulgent and—lazy. Well, anyway," he sighed, rather proudly, "it does a fellow good to have somebody to own up to, and I—I thank you."

His eyes sprang to hers with almost a cry for sympathy; and it was enough that she smiled at him; she did not speak. She smiled *at* him, after all, he reflected—not *with* him. He was petulant in his haste to assume what he had forfeited; and Mary's smile was kind enough, wholly without spiritual conceit—and at the same time as inevitably, hopelessly removed from him as her beautiful eyes were in themselves a symbol of exotic splendor.

He endeavored foolishly, on the instant, to imagine that her hands, worn and disfigured somewhat by unaccustomed housework, brought her in some sense to a lower level, but the thought would not linger. Rather, she was a queen as she excused herself and went out to her work in the kitchen.

"'Environment' doesn't make or mar her," was Rob's mental comment. "No, by Jove, environment don't touch her. Well, I've known girls as high-flown as she that would marry me—when I had my money—but *she* wouldn't marry me, money or no money; she'd claw my eyes out before she'd marry me."

Rob went up to his own room, his mind sweeping—impetuous, unstable—from one new thought to another. Drinking, not thinking, had been his occupation, as one

may say truthfully. Drinking, playing, mental somnolence—not thinking, not even truly feeling. The sudden plunge into so untried an employment drove him like a fever.

Oh, for a drink now to still the tempest in his brain as well as to quench his diseased abnormal physical craving. He paced the floor like a madman. A glimmer, fuller and more penetrating than usual, drew his attention. He saw that the best lamp had been set burning in his room, making it cozy and light; for, though it was Spring, the nights were wintry cold. Extra covering had been piled on the bed, and the little stand with the Bible had some of the latest magazines on it, sent to Mary by acquaintances and friends who had not quite forgotten her in their more luxurious world. The best of her estate she had given to him to warm and cheer him.

“That was very good of her,” said Rob, and paused and made a sort of bow before the table, as if acknowledging some courtesy in a drawing-room. He fingered the magazines so heedlessly they fluttered off to the floor, leaving the Bible exposed.

“I haven’t read that old book”—Rob’s wild thoughts suddenly leaped to a concentration *somewhere*—“not since I was a little shaver in black velvet and stopped to Sunday school with old Hulda, my nurse, waiting for me on the back bench. Black velvet and ruffled shirt, and curls to my waist—portrait full-length, in the library at home, little whip in my hand; standing by white pony; face as dimpled and sweet as a baby that’s just sucked himself full from a nursing-bottle. Remember how Florry Doreen went up and pasted pink

wings on to it, that night Fred and I had half the ballet there. Oh, my God! how long ago it all seems!"

Indirectly and heedlessly, he threw open the long-forgotten book, and it lay flat, with a certain remarkable story staring up at him in big print:

"Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus at the well: and it was about the sixth hour.

"There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

"Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

"Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. . . .

"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

"But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

Rob, standing carelessly by the table, read the story quite through; then flipped the book together again. Black velvet and pony-whip; and, years later, the orgy with Florry Doreen, and pink wings pasted on the glass over his cherubic portrait. Back in the black-velvet age, another impression, that stood out before him with undimmed vitality, and which he expounded indifferently to the low walls of his room.

"That's religion—that 'water' it tells about in the Bible; it means 'religion.'"

The amiable quality of piety was entirely dissociated in Rob's mind from his maddening desire to be on a

character-plane corresponding with, or above, that of Mary Stingaree and her like—to rule, to command, to reign, as somehow, though poverty-stricken, she nevertheless reigned.

Throwing himself on his bed, his tumultuous brain craved to know how, quickly, by some means to reach that altitude; exulted in the fever of imagination as though he were there; sank again into bitter despondency; and ever, into the background of his confused and restless tossing, there slowly took shape and grew before him into almost palpable distinctness, the portrait of a dimpled boy, with love and faith and heavenly innocence in his smiling blue eyes.

So was heaven merciful to him, for otherwise he could not have slept; but at last the portrait, so far away from him in every sense now that it seemed no more than the portrait of a strange existence, lured him with its sweet young smile into the untroubled pastures of sleep.

CHAPTER VII

JOGGINS—NOT SO STEEP

"It's a shame for you to give me the best of everything, Miss Stingaree. You must not do it." Rob brought down the parlor lamp in the morning himself, with this remark. Mary looked up with interest, Bate with stolid amaze.

Mary was entering the room bearing a platter; Rob held the door open for her with his disengaged hand, at the same time bending his head very low. Bate's stolid amaze turned to a sly, knowing leer. "He's after the old girl," thought this exalted being.

Poor Rob would have been only scandalized by the profanation of such a thought. He was not "after Mary": she was out of his reach. But he had awakened unaccountably refreshed, had rubbed himself vigorously with cold water, perforce, there being no other, had brushed his hair to a sense of physical perfection. The tonic of the wild air shone in his blood; and, though he must eliminate Mary Stingaree as any tender aspiration from his equation of life, yet he meant to have just as good a time as possible under the circumstances. So he held the door open, with his masterpiece bow, and waited.

"Thank you," she replied. Her face brightened. Rob continued his courteous offices at the table, begging permission to pass the food whenever occasion required.

He addressed some general remarks on the administrative policy of farming to Bate, whose sly leer widened under this auspicious fostering as he growled in reply.

"Miss Stingaree," said Rob, as they rose, "you offered me the—the oxen and cart, yesterday; but I—I—well, I went down to Bear River to make some arrangements about—ahem—about rockweed. Will it be convenient for you to let me have the oxen and cart to-day?"

"Have you planned to use them to-day, Bate?" Mary asked.

Bate shook his head, with an anticipation in his eye which took on as nearly the hue of wickedness as his dull and degraded emotions could convey.

"Certainly," said Mary, answering Rob's request, "you may take them."

"Yer ground's been dressed," muttered Bate contemptuously for Rob's ignorance; "ye'd better plow it up."

"I have my own ideas about that," replied Rob, with dignity. "I wish to make a further application of rockweed, to—to dress it some more, in fact"—the vision of the beach down the shore, and bright, laughing Cuby Tee-bo drawing him away from the sordid and unknown qualities of his unattacked farm.

"Suit yerself," rejoined Bate, departing with the aforesaid glimmer of malign humor on his countenance.

Rob, for his part, went gingerly into the barnyard, though it was not from fear of the oxen, those grave, slow beasts; he meant to keep his boots nice, notwithstanding that fate might wield all her emprise to thwart

him in this particular. He fastened the bells, somehow, around the oxen's necks, with a certain pride in the accomplishment of this bucolic rite. Then he essayed to lash the yoke to their horns. The retrospective wisdom of ages sat in their mild eyes as they consented to observe, for a time, the freshness and novelty of his adventures in this regard. One of them, indeed, in an easy fit of abstraction, had become bound after a fashion, at which pass the other indolently demurred, to the extent of stepping a yard or two away out of the range of Rob's boresome experiments. How to get this mildly recalcitrant beast into the required close proximity to his mate?

"Come here, sir," cried Rob manfully, fraternally, "come you here, sir."

Ox, standing a yard or so away, gazed at Rob in a placid, removed trance of rumination.

"Come up here, good old fellow. Come alongside. Gee. Haw. Giddup. I'm done fooling with you—now you march along up here."

Ox, motionless, closed his weary eyes and chewed the cud.

Rob took the oxwhip from its support against the fence and attempted to snap the lash in true rural fashion. The result was like that of a torpedo which falls in untimely disintegration and does not explode. Ox, dreaming, perhaps, of the insects of summer—dreaming, anyway—rouses enough to survey Rob through the unperturbed fringe of an eyelash and walks to the far end of the yard. Rob tramped through the mire to his rear and flecked him tentatively with the whip. Ox, with a mere show of quickness that was redolent also

of contempt, walks to another remote corner. So, round and round the barnyard, Rob followed that dignified, speculative, half-somnolent animal, the latter seeking every nook and corner save the accustomed one at his mate's side. Rob, amidst deeper chagrin, surveyed helplessly the spectacle of his boots.

"Bate, Bate!" he called at last, in a confidentially insinuating tone. Bate, if the truth had been known, had gone on down the road to share the facetious news generously with others, and to watch Rob's later procession.

Peering over the fence, Rob saw Mrs. Byjo striding self-confidently over her own acres. He left the occult and confounding proposition in the barnyard, and appeared before her, very cordially, and also very red in the face. His hat went off voluntarily, by his own hand this time:

"Mrs. Stafford, may I ask a great favor of you?"

"Certainly. What can I do to help you?" replied the woman briskly, her good-humored eyes meeting his frankly.

"Those confounded oxen won't hang together," said Rob.

"That so? Well, we'll hang 'em."

With a few sturdy admonitions by word of mouth, and some equally drastic manipulations of the whip, Mrs. Byjo had the oxen yoked in no time.

"When you want 'em to make to the right, 'gee' 'em—so; when you want 'em to steer to the left, 'haw' 'em—this way; when you want to stop 'em, 'whoa' 'em right up for'ard with the whip—so." She handed the

whip to Rob. "You'd better take the Joggins road," she added; "it's not so steep, opens right off my farm, there, into the woods. Bear down the lane here, then steer along the track on the edge o' the woods till ye turn down into Joggins."

"Thank you, a thousand times—thank you, Mrs. Stafford," said Rob, humbly, obsequious—that is the truth—before the woman who had whacked him the day before, and yoked the oxen for him this morning. But the wind on that hill-plain somehow blew all the past vapors, weaknesses, and mortifications out of a man's brain; its health and monitions were sufficient for the hour.

Rob stepped into the cart carefully, his long legs having known recent paralysis. He blushed a little; he envied, actually, that morning, more than aught else on earth, just the thighs and sinews of a lusty clod-hopper.

"Look here, Mr. Hilton," the woman called after him, with the kindest intention, her sturdy arms akimbo, "if I were you, I'd get out and walk, by Jo, till I got a leetle more experience drivin' my team."

"Oh, I think I know the ropes now all right, thank you, Mrs. Stafford," said Rob, again lifting his hat; "these beasts never go out of a walk, you know."

Rob did not hear it, but a stifled murmur went down the sylvan shades of the Joggins road: "He's turned in to Joggins. He's in sight. Daisy's comin'. Daisy Lee's a-comin'. He's ridin', too, cock-sure, the ridick'lous ass."

As for Daisy himself, he sat on the rough plank laid casually overlapping the sideboards of the cart; and all

his study was, by constant maneuvering, to keep the plank—which was constantly changing its position. by reason of the roughness of the road—from upsetting, and at the same time to maintain something like a self-respecting equilibrium. Absorbed in this pursuit, he went rattling and pommeling down Joggins, using the butt-end of his whip for a personal bracer, his clay pipe clenched between his teeth; and so agilely, more and more, did he conduct himself that his pride expanded with each athletic avoidance of overthrow and destruction, his eyes shone with the exercise, his cheeks were braw with color, and, though riding only in a miserable oxcart, to be sure, yet Rob began actually to glow with the sensation of being a big, skillful, devil-may-care, masterful wildman.

Then it was that a domestic cat, having either through some malign human persuasion, or else through some sullen grief and purpose of her own, deserted the affiliations of her proper home for a flight into the woods, sprang pointedly, and with a swiftness as though she had been winged, across the road right in the faces of the oxen.

From no former movement that Rob had ever discerned in them could he have anticipated the panther-like celerity of the elliptic which they now performed in the upper circles of the atmosphere. The ponderous climax of their descent he observed from a sitting posture in the perturbed and indignant center of a mountain spring; the plank which had so recently been his insecure support had hurtled harmlessly over his head, giving him in its fall a no more dignified attack than the throwing of a jocose splinter to tickle his left

ear; while the oxen continued down Joggins on a run not now so swift as it was deafeningly celebrant with noise.

Bate, with an improvised whip, sprang out from the bushes and stayed this unbecoming spectacle of ponderous levity. Another figure emerged with the deceptive manner as of having paused for diversion on its legitimate way to important affairs. Captain Belcher leaned against a tree, not weeping in spirit, though his appearance was certainly that of an hysterical mourner. He mopped his eyes and cheeks with a handkerchief of unutterable hue.

"That circus you giv' me t'other day wan't complete without a chariot race," he moaned, "was it, Mr. Lee? I knew the chariot race 'ud have ter come, and, by Tunk, it has come."

Other apparitions hailed from the covert of the wood, other evidences of lively entertainment greeted poor Rob's wounded ear ere yet he had had time to rise from his sitting posture in the pool by the wayside. Devoutly then he even wished that he might discover a broken bone to shame this heartless ribaldry: but he found on rising that he was entirely whole, nay, even limbered by his abrupt descent into the ditch.

Whether to turn and go home—and meet Mary Stingaree, and Mrs. Byjo, who had become a factor serious to cope with—no; Rob braced himself. His head was clear, and humiliation at a certain depth suffers a rebound. He advanced with squared shoulders to the group surrounding the oxen.

"I'm downright sorry, Bate," he said. "I had an impression, somehow, that oxen never got frightened.

If you hadn't been in the woods, my carelessness might have done lots of damage to your team. I ought to have been on my guard."

"I knew somethin' 'd happen to ye," replied Bate ungraciously, examining the yoke straps.

"Well, may I go on with the oxen?" said Rob. "I'll walk along at their heads this time."

"Oh, g'wan," said Bate; "ye may as well make a day of it."

Rob tramped on almost clingingly close to the horned beasts who had betrayed him; though he was now apparently alone, he was skeptical; the air was somehow rife with mischief and the tinkling bells on the oxen's necks seemed to mock his sad, defeated heart. Even in Power Lot, God Help Us, he was already a jest and a byword, and now at Bear River he had become a byword and a hissing. By the shores of the great Basin there were some neat houses where retired sea captains and moderately prosperous farmers dwelt, a society away beyond his reach; so felt Mr. Robert Hilton, late millionaire.

So judged he implicitly in his really modest, even childlike, heart, however great his outward bravado, that only the lowest of the low would tolerate him, and they, perchance, but condescendingly.

Judging by the Tee-bo cabin, down the River, they, too, were the lowest of the low. Would Cuby have arrived and be waiting to meet him on the beach as she had promised? No, she was not there, he found; nor did she come. The tide was low, it chanced, and he was saved that much ridicule. He had made no reckoning concerning it, and it was only by luck that he had

not come down, so perilously and ignominiously, with the oxen to gather rockweed at high tide.

He halted his oxen successfully at the place where Cuby had admonished him to gather in those spoils of the sea, but he had forgotten to bring rake, pitchfork, or sheath-knife. Some sparse, ragged kelp had been drifted up on the beach, however, and to save himself from the shame of complete futility, he began gathering it up in his hands and carrying it to the cart. Though he toiled arduously, the accumulated product was startlingly insignificant. He looked not much about him, so grievously conscious was he of unseen existences in the atmosphere peering derisively down upon his toils.

On the contrary, the voice that did actually assail him was mild, feeling, almost timid:

“What in Tamarack be you a-doin’?” it said.

Rob looked up and found that he was alone with the sea, the bowlders, and an old man in a fur cap, red woolen stockings, and short trousers of sacking. But it was the old man’s face that held Rob’s attention, framed as it was in white hair blowing in the wind, and with eyes like large, young, sinless violets looking out from the sod and seam of weather-beaten features.

“What—tamarack what?” said poor Rob inquisitively, in his confusion.

“Wal’, what in tarnation thunder, then, be you a-doin’?”

“Why, I was going to take a little rockweed up to dress my land.”

“Le’ me see, you’re the feller what’s come from New York up to Power Lot, ain’t ye? God help us.”

This instant recognition of him through his dilemma did not seem flattering to Rob.

"I am," he replied coldly, "Robert Hilton. Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"*Skipper. Skipper* 'll do. I ain't heard no other name so long, I 'most forgot I got any other name." Pride, tinged with vanity, dwelt peacefully on the old man's lips as he uttered this term.

Rob melted. "I am delighted," he said, stepping forward, "to make your acquaintance, Skipper."

"Oh, wal', I don't know as we c'd call it gittin' acquainted, yit," said the old man conscientiously, "tho' it may come to that ef we keep on. Ye got a h'ist, didn't ye?"

"What?"

"Yer clo's, to aft o' ye thar, look as though ye'd had a h'ist."

"Yes—oh, yes—I had a h'ist, all right. The oxen shied at a cat."

"Slewed and upsot ye, eh?"

"Yes."

"Hurt ye?"

"No," said Rob bitterly, "I almost wish it had."

"Sho, don't you go wigglin' yer finger at Providence temptin' Him to heave aches and pains on to ye. I know, for I'm a victim o' rheumatiz: it's ache and pain, pain and ache, throb and beat, beat and throb, and, some nights, roll and toss, toss and roll—roll and toss, toss and roll."

"As it is out yonder," said Rob, the vivid restlessness of Skipper's phrase turning him to the poetry of the sea.

"I use' ter be the very toughest devil 'long shore here," Skipper confided, looking out wistfully to sea.

"It doesn't seem possible."

"It's down in black and white in the Books ag'in' me," affirmed the old man, with a reminiscent sigh of satisfaction. "I was the streakin'est, ontamable dog 't ever made out on the Bay o' Fundy—but rheumatiz has tamed me."

Rob's own actual physical sufferings returned to his recollection, and he yearned as to a kindred soul.

"I was a gre't drinker, too," boasted Skipper,, placidly, "an' Gosh A'mighty, the perfanity I use' ter use!"

He was preaching, perhaps. Rob bridled. "I suppose you've heard some sort of meddling, unkind stories about me," he suggested, reddening.

"Never seen ye nor heern tell of ye, afore, 'cept ye was somebody comin' ter Power Lot, f'r yer health, God help us." There was no curiosity and little interest in the strangely undimmed, deep-set eyes of the old man. Those pansied eyes gave to his face an expression of womanly tenderness, rendered only more wistful by his professed hankering after past wildness.

"Yes, sir; I was a devil-screecher, I was. I was a roarer."

"I've been something of a roarer, too," Rob confided in turn, all his suspicions allayed.

"Was ye?" said Skipper, wakening. "Master or mate?"

"Master," blurted out Rob, with tears of regret and desolation in his eyes, "and a d—d poor one, too."

"Run her on the ledges, mebbly, an' wrecked her?"

"Yes."

"Nev' mind. Nev' mind; ye're young; y'll fitten out a new vessel an' gallop 'er over seas, yit, you will. What's the next cruise ye're cal'latin' on?"

"New York City."

"Sho! You strike f'r different orders, you 'ply f'r another berth. Sho, down among them 'trusts'; ef I was you I'd make f'r some Christian port, or innercent heathen one, I would. Trusts, blame durn 'em, my las' Sunday roast cost me thirty-four cents, an' she didn't weigh quite on to six pounds, neither; an' them trusts is to the bottom of it, durn blast 'em."

"What kind of meat was it?"

"Sirline. Lo'ette an' me ain't got our 'riginal God-bestowed grinders no longer; sirline 's tough 's we're able to chaw up at our time o' the day."

"What did you use to pay for your Sunday roast?"

"Twenty cents," sighed Skipper.

"It's becoming an iniquitous imposition on you," said Rob sympathetically.

"Don't say a word. Look at medicines and doctors—they've got on to the dicker, too. Had a little friction in my throat; rheumatiz left my legs, one time, 'long about first o' May, an' hived up in my throat. Sent the descriptions o' my case to a young doctor the' was then down to Bear River, an', by Tamarack, I sent ten cents, too, along o' the descriptions. He sent me back a leetle box o' pills."

"Did they help you?"

"They purty nigh done for me. I lay so low the case was took out o' my hands, an' the critter came up thar' twice a day in 'tendance on me, till I got my mor-

talities up as whar' I could shout ag'in—then says I, 'You go home an' make out yer bill; I ain't goin' to continue the treatment no longer.'"

"How much was the bill?" Rob ventured.

"Fifty cents, by Kresis. I paid the bill, but I got my opinions o' that doctor. Sick er well, I'll anchor up by Peruny the rest o' my days."

"Is Peruny cheap?" Rob questioned, with childlike faith.

"She ain't so cheap," said Skipper, with intonations of savory reminiscence, "as she is toothsome. Water's all right, but a man 't's been the dog I been wants to tie up once in a while to somethin' 't's got a wasp in it. Now, look at them gulls! Jest look!"

Rob looked.

"They got a blame durn trust o' their own," said Skipper. "I come down here to smelt a bit."

"To what?"

"Wal', not so much to smelt as to herrin'. I reckoned to git a few off the boys; but jest look thar'. Soon as a few herrin' pokes in, the gulls comes an' picks 'em up. See 'em, huverin' an' watchin'—ain't that a 'trust'? New York—you make f'r some decent port, young man. Wal', I got ter scramble up the bluffs to'ds home."

Skipper turned unceremoniously.

"Good-by," said Rob, holding out his hands. Rob had a lonesome look. "I'd like to come up and see you and Mrs. Skipper some time," he almost pleaded.

"God-in-heaven," said the old man, with frank surprise at the craving look and tone; "why in Tamarack don't ye come then? Lo'ette ain't much ter look at,

but she's a good woman, my woman is; one o' these 'ere flower-raisin', Bible-readin', meetin'-goin' kind. It's a good kind ter have. I'm more 'n satisfied. Phew, thar' it is, pain an' ache, ache an' pain, beat an' throb, throb an' beat, an' sometimes roll an' toss, toss an' roll; roll an' toss, toss an'——"

Rob gathered the dying cadences of Skipper's apostrophe to rheumatism as he watched him climb the bluffs to the comfortable white house in the distance. Rob, who had been very rich, who had been assiduously courted, before his downward course became too foolish and rapid—Rob looked with awe to that ordinary white house and the coveted privilege of calling on that sad dog, the skipper, and his old wife Lo'ette. He was comforted, though, by his communion with a fellow-creature. The tide had crept in and regathered the rockweed from the beach; so he started the oxen pensively homeward with a scarcely perceptible amount of sea-spoil, lying withered and puny on the cart-bottom.

He felt that bright Cuby Tee-bo, with the others, had given him over to ridicule, and he tramped on automatically, with his eyes on the ground, and with the intention of getting up the Joggins road in time to saw enough wood to pay for his supper. He was taking in this new life stupidly, but, now that his head was clear, with a sort of dogged faithfulness.

"Daisy! Halloo!"

An imperative voice, subdued to confidence, certified him of an engaging presence near; at the same time he caught the starlight and sunlight of brown eyes peering out at him, all the more luminous for the con-

trast they made with the dark firs skirting the Joggins road.

"Why, Cuby. Hello, Cuby. How do you do?" Rob, the forsaken, could hardly believe his good luck. "Why didn't you come to the beach as you said?"

"'Cause I'm 'shamed o' you—that's why."

Rob saw interest and affection still lurking under her forbidding demeanor, and, bravely smiling, he stood and gazed at her with an expression of ever-increasing fondness.

"Ridin' bumpity-bump like a green-a-horn down Joggins," she flouted him; "an' gettin' runaway with them oxen. And now, look me, at what you are bringin' home. The boys shall make a laugh at you. Already they wait with Bate to help-a you onload. Dump out this minute that so small little mess o' weeds."

"Isn't it better to take home a little than none, Cuby?"

"No, it is not so."

With her lithe brown hands she was already scattering the weeds as indistinguishably as possible into the ditch. Rob without further question sprang to aid her in the sacrifice.

"But now I cannot 'dress' my land any," he admonished her.

"I said that to make fool of you—and to have you come to the beach," she admitted; "but I knew not that you was already such a fool as you turn yourself out to be. No, I did not."

Rob bit the lip under his mustache. Had the insult come from a masculine source he would have darted an impetuous blow at the aggressor. Offense or defense

were not to be thought of under the circumstances; indignation quickly faded. Cuby was bewitching, in spite of the fussy Sunday hat which she had donned for the occasion. There were three corners to this hat, and from each corner depended a bunch of artificial flowers. Cuby's face sparkled between lilies of the valley and full-blown red roses, and the roses were wan beside her cheeks, and the lilies were yellow in contrast with her teeth. Added to all this brilliance, there was a provoking and alluring flame in her eyes.

"Bate, he says you have begun to make courtin' at his sister, Ma'y Sting'ree."

"It's a lie—oh, she's a nice girl—woman—enough, for aught I know, but I—I don't want her."

"Bate wants *me*," said Cuby; "he wishes for to get engage' to me mighty bad, too—that I can tell-a you."

A queenly indecision among suitors hung on her red lips, and she breathed like some wild, sweet thing of the forest. Rob straightway put his arm tenderly over her shoulder.

"I know somebody I *do* love," he murmured, his winsome face dangerously close to her passionate one.

"Quit you!" cried Cuby imperiously. "We are not yet engage'."

"Well, but why can't we be engaged, Cuby?" suggested desolate Rob, and he held her closer, and his lips pressed hers; and now he was ready to fight for her.

Cuby did not turn pale; she was not so much in love but that she remained complete master of the situation and deliberately, romantically, and skillfully

played her victim still further with the spell of her flashing beauty.

“Oh, but you are so beeg, so gr-r-rand, Rober’, when you wish; why do you not knock the stuffin’s out o’ them?”

Rob could have caught her in his arms, so exquisitely beautiful was she in contrast with the virile matter of her speech.

“You shall see,” he hissed through his strong white teeth, in a sympathetic ardor of animosity, but, above all, longing to hug Cuby Tee-bo.

“Me—no—I fear you are too sof’,” she hesitated sadly; “they make such a laugh, I almost cry, an’ am mad; almost they hear me out loud I am so mad, that, after all I tell you, you make yourself so ‘sissy.’ Ugh! Bah! An’ stay not on the board, no, but wreegle yourself, an’ go bumpity-bump, bumpity-bump—oh, tam!—an’ then make yourself one beeg tumble.”

“Very well, Cuby, I was careless, but another time Rob Hilton stays on the board—will you remember that? And right now you’ve got to beg my pardon for calling me ‘Daisy,’ a while ago—beg! beg!”

“I think I see myself making *baig* to such a sof’ ninny-sheep like you be.”

This, with Cuby’s daring nature, was nothing less than an approving challenge, and Rob promptly took advantage of it to imprint another kiss on her tempting mouth; at the same time he squeezed, and roughly, the little hand folded in his.

“Beg,” he commanded.

“Wal’, then,” at last confessed Cuby hopefully, “I *baig*.” She added, however, with great earnestness:

“Everything—*everything*, I think, run away with *you*. Even a leetle lamb, so weak as nothin’, make beeg bluff, maybe, an’ run away with *you*. *Everything* run away with *you*.”

“Perhaps that is true,” said Rob sternly; “anyway, Cuby—sweet—*you* have run away with me.”

CHAPTER VIII

AS A PUGILIST

“TEN dozens of them already; fine linen, shirts, collars, handkerchiefs—what can be done with them, Robert?”

Mary herself looked as stumped in the matter as did Rob.

“Why, of course,” he exclaimed promptly, “I’ll send them out to be laundered—where can I send them?”

“That is just it,” Mary replied. “‘Echo answers, *Where?*’ There’s no such work, in such quantities at least, done anywhere about here; I don’t know of any woman who could do it, or would have the time, with her other cares; you see, it would take her *days*, and the pile constantly increasing.”

Rob’s head swam and his heart sank as the various pressing necessities of existence, hitherto unconsidered or taken as a matter of course, now stared him in the face—and he with only one dollar left in his pocket, if the truth were known. The woodpile warned him, too, that for his very sustenance he was in arrears. Where, moreover, and from whence, were to come means for the “suckers”—the staple article of Bear River confectionery—with which it had been his pleasure to supply lovely Cuby? Where and from whence were to come those sodden “plugs” of molasses-and-ginger

tobacco which he had grown to regard in some sense as a mitigation of his sorrows?

"I've got to get back to New York," he ejaculated. "I have friends there. Isn't there some way I can get back to New York, Miss Stingaree?" he appealed to her in almost a wheedling tone. "Can't you get Jim to sail me over to Waldeck station? I can manage then—somehow—to get back home. I tell you, I must go. Won't you help me to arrange it, Miss Stingaree?"

"I wouldn't give up," said Mary, a pride transcending that of Lucifer flaming in her eyes; "not for the sake of some starched shirts and collars. I wouldn't give up any honest work I had begun—to go away and beg, and cling like an infant to others for support, not if I died for it."

Her look was too far above and away from him to flatter him as the probing of any speciousness in his conduct. She was clearly brave and matter-of-fact, and, otherwise, indifferent. But, oh, she was splendid, thought poor Rob, and he bit his lip and turned pitifully pale.

"Well, what—what *shall* I do, Miss Stingaree?"

She smiled kindly. She was so radiantly far away, but no shame or contempt attached to her speech.

"Why not do your washing, to begin with? Wash these fine things and put them away. Wear your out-ing-flannels hereafter; surely you have some? And you can wash them yourself every week. It is very simple."

Rob stood with his mouth open until this vein of reasoning had pierced his laggard intelligence. Rob



"HOW CAN YOU TURN YOUR BACK ON THAT VIEW?"

Hilton doing his own washing! He advanced by leaps, however, when some rugged pinnacle of attainment appealed to his ever-ready sense of novelty.

"Gee!" he beamed on Mary; and with that mirth-abounding smile he threw to the winds all the hitherto stringent conventions and wearily artificial superfluities of existence; his language became confidently reckless, too, and smacked fearlessly of the Skipper and Belcher vocabulary. "Gee!" he commended Mary, "you're it! I'll do it! what in—Tamarack, do I care?"

Forthwith, then, he brought up the washtubs from the cellar, carried water from the well, tempered it with carefully prized donations from the teakettle in the kitchen, and proceeded to scrub his fine linen, whistling a jubilant accompaniment as he stood over the wash-bench out of doors.

"How can you turn you back on that view?" cried Mary very pleasantly from the door.

Rob wheeled round. White-capped bay, tumbling basin; to the left, the swelling river flanked by its tragic hills; he, upon vaster heights; all round him an infinite wild country. There came to him in that instant the thought, that just to *live*—to live, and stand, and breathe—was inexpressibly dramatic.

"It's great," he admitted with bared head, in a tone of honest solemnity to Mary.

"By the One-Eyed Monocle," he murmured later to the sud of the washboard, unconsciously reproducing a phrase of the cosmopolitan Belcher, "but this perch, all 'round here, is only fit for eagles."

Eagles, indeed, were frequently heard screaming by

day, loons wailed by night. Rob fancied that he enjoyed the loons.

"They've probably made fools o' themselves—like me," he consented drowsily, on those occasions when their forlorn cadences had penetrated to his ear at night.

But the view was beginning to interest him, and the breeze had salty life in it. Work, sweat, were miraculously ridding him of his muscular stiffness and pains. The craving for strong drink was maddening at times, but after all what time had he to consider the matter? Sawing and splitting wood in the fierce, silent pride of attempting to maintain his independence, as well as to supply daily sop to an increasingly unappeasable appetite; plowing, planting, and all the rest of it; no more Joggins, but rushing down the steep way, in some brief rest from toil and back again, with sustained breath now, bearing a kiss from Cuby. Altogether, the days were investing Rob with a sort of kaleidoscopic impetuosity of exercise.

Between meals he fed an unstilled inward appeal with unmeasured quantities of water from the spring; and there was still a store of apples in the cellar. Bate's custom was to pick up an armful of apples, retire with them to the pig-pen fence, and, munching the sounder specimens himself, to throw over the decayed ones to the pigs, while he observed with meditative interest the lack of courtesy prevailing within the pen, occasionally throwing over for his own entertainment a paring or a core to swell to livelier dimensions the unlovely holocaust of rivalry among the swine.

Rob had sometimes allowed the most unattractive of

the fruit, together with discarded cores and skins, to slip heedlessly from his hands to earth; until on one occasion he saw Bate thriftily gathering them up and bearing them to the pen for purposes both of utility and mental revelry, as herein before described.

Not wishing any further to antagonize him, whose sweetheart he had already inadvertently stolen in his careless, off-hand manner, Rob gathered up a recuperative supply of apples from the cellar and went to join Bate for a few moments of friendly converse by the pig-pen fence.

Bate morosely paid no attention to this tacit appeal for mortal communion.

"I tell you, Bate," said Rob, nevertheless, in his boyish, laughing voice, putting his shining teeth through an apple, "it's deuced funny, the way we get on up here, isn't it? Bacon fat and potato make 'hash,' and we have hash till the old choppin'-tray must be worn thin as an eggshell; and beans, and meal bread—ha! ha! And clams, and once in a while a fish; and meat for Sundays! Really, you ought to see some of the steaks we have in New York, broiled, two inches thick, served up with mushrooms, and, for incidentals, quail and terrapin, and scallops and frogs' hind-legs; and sauterne, and claret, and port, and fizzy champagne, and old whisky, and——"

Rob smacked his lips, an aching sorrow in his eyes.

"Get out o' here," said Bate gruffly.

Rob thought Bate's tone signified only a heart-broken appreciation of the good things so hopelessly beyond his reach, and he went on:

"Say, the first few times I ate 'meat' here, I couldn't

taste it, for wondering what it was. Ha! Ha! *Tough? Strings?* Oh, Tamarack! But, now, I'm crazy for it. Honest, Bate, I look forward to the day when old Sloke 'll drive his butcher's cart up Joggins, full o' leather an' shoestrings an' baseball covers. I swipe mine off my plate as fast as you do, now; I give you my word I'm hungry an hour after I've filled up on beans and cornmeal, and then it's apples and water, and water and apples—Ha! Ha!—and apples and water, and water and apples——”

“Get out o' here!” repeated Bate, this time in a tone whose inflections were unmistakably not those of sympathy. “Just as soon as you git yer muscle up a little, Daisy Lee, I'll give ye a lickin' ye 'll never furgit. But I don't want ter maul a sissy; so ye're safe.”

“What is the matter with you, Bate?” said Rob, deeply chagrined at this requital of his kindly meant overtures. Bate had often growled openly at his food and at Mary; while Rob's present diatribe had been given only in the purest jest, feeling as he did keenly that gratitude was an eminently becoming garb both for himself and Bate under the circumstances in which poor Mary did her lavish best. He had intended only a bit of jolly intercourse concerning what he regarded as their mutual epicurean difficulties.

Aside from that he considered Bate as rather a sort of third, slow, stupid ox on the place, a grumpy beast of burden.

The snarl and menace were a disagreeable surprise.

“He's taking this excuse to attack me, because Cuby likes my company,” discerned Rob in a flash of mental acumen, and silently he regretted that he had made

Bate's ear the storehouse of his mirth; it had not been worth while.

"What is the matter with you, Bate?" he asked, his sunny good-natured face and tone seeking to ignore the later phases of the dilemma.

"Git out o' here!" responded Bate, as if to a dog. "Go and git out o' my sight, Miss Lee."

"See here, you mangy brute, I go where I like," Rob advised him with portent emphasis. "*You'd* better get over into the pen there with your mates."

Bate ground his teeth.

"Ef you darst come over thar' behind the firs," he suggested tauntingly, "I'll give you a dose you can chaw on till this time next year. Ef you *darst*, an' ef you *darzent* I'll punish ye right here whar' ye be; an' don't cry, f'r perhaps Ma'y 'll come out an' resky ye. She can see ye, ef ye stay right whar' ye be."

Rob, making no pause whatever for contemplation, marched over behind the firs. He towered above Bate, but he was not an athlete, nor had he ever made any practice, directly or indirectly, toward that end. He had eluded skillfully the bore of submitting to a college education; his travels had been performed in the most soft and luxurious fashion.

Bate, in spite of his occasional excesses, had the sturdy muscles indurate through habits of toil and hardship.

"Here I am," sneered Rob, beside himself with passion, "over here behind the firs where Miss Stingaree can't rescue me. Now come on and punish me!"

At the word Bate sprang toward him, aiming a swift, clean blow that felled him to earth.

Rob rose staggering—a fiend now, an incarnate fury with but one intent. Life or death, it mattered not; only to reach that sullen, derisive face leering at him through the mist of his pain and frenzy; with fists, with teeth, with tearing finger-nails, he cared not how, but he felt that he should reach that black taunting goal before he died, and his blood surged with a blinding ferocity. Bate, grinning, teased him, affected to play with him, raining down, however, at every opportunity the sting of malicious blows. Rob reached a point at last where he did not feel those blows, but they fell off from him as from a thing insensate; his working, streaming face had taken on a deadly quiet, his bloodshot eyes a superhuman steadiness and watchfulness. Bate contemptuously interpreted this as the glazing sign of accepted defeat; and at that instant he found himself sprawling on his back under the scintillant glare of two blue eyes that looked as big as suns, modified only by an area of set white teeth that seemed of sufficient purpose to devour him; for, with the intensity of his attack, Rob had fallen with him and upon him.

Thus, fettering his opponent by his unexerted weight, and restraining him with the clutch of desperate arms, Rob gazed down upon him, and the blood from his pink and white face dropped down upon Bate's swarthy features.

"H'ist yerself, you mad ox!" said Bate, with the first impulse of his recovered breath. "Heave yerself up, you d—d side-of-a-barn! This ain't no fair play."

Rob tightened the strenuous grip that held his victim.

"This ain't play," he sobbed with spent breath; "guess you'll find I'm in earnest 'fore I get through with you."

"You durn mountain of a fool-baby, let me up, I say."

Rob, a little appeased by the sight of blood on his victim's face, grinned triumphantly in rejoinder.

"Say, '*Mr. Hilton, I've had enough, if you please,*' and I'll let you up."

Bate lay smoldering with hate and fury, scornfully silent. Rob's breath began to come less like the gasp of the dying, and he warily strengthened the fastnesses of his position. Bate's very frame began to resent the stricture of those confining arms; moreover someone might appear on the scene and find him in this ridiculous and humiliating plight.

"Say, Rob, let me up," he said, in a bitter travesty of a conciliatory tone, "and we'll call it quits."

"Say '*Mr. Hilton, I've had enough, if you please.*'"

"Curse ye, ye may stay there till yer arms rot off, then."

But while this disagreeable process was in its merest inception, Mary Stingaree suddenly appeared around the edge of the fir trees.

"You promised me you would not do that," she exclaimed impetuously to Bate; then, realizing the actual situation, and that it was Bate, and not Rob, who lay vanquished, she stood in speechless wonder.

"I was pastin' him blind," Bate made haste to assert, "when the great moon-calf teetered and fell on me. I thought the North mountain had tumbled."

"Say," simply repeated Rob, in Mary's presence,

with unctious accents of politeness, "say 'Mr. Hilton, I've had enough, if you please,' and I'll let you up."

Bate snorted, and spake not.

"Let him up, Robert," said Mary.

At the lady's command Rob rose regretfully. "Which is it," he observed, however, smoothly to Bate, "which is it that Miss Stingaree has 'rescued'?"

Bate made another spring for his adversary; but a new and fresh element entered the arena at this moment, and Bate's truculency wilted down into a faded and surly withdrawal from the scene. It was Mrs. Byjo, calmly and curiously inspecting the situation through her spectacles, her faithful oxwhip at her side.

"Quit fightin'," she remarked dispassionately.

The sole remaining belligerent, Rob, assented to this behest with a bloody smile.

"Yes 'm," he subjoined softly.

The eyes that gazed through Mrs. Byjo's spectacles were not so very old after all. Rob suspected a twinkle in them, and a twinkle not unfriendly to himself, at that. His torn heart, shattered and left empty by the retreating surges of passion, warmed a little.

"Excuse me; I think I need to go and take a bath," he murmured, spurning from his mouth the warm blood which trickled persistently thither from his nose.

"He had him down," he heard Mary confide to Mrs. Byjo, as he retreated. "Rob had him down!" The wonder in the voice cut him to the quick, and roused his blood again to a vivifying storm. So it was subject only for amaze that *he* should put anything down? Very well, very well! Having washed himself, he returned to his tubs; but strangely enough, neither blows

nor the loss of much crimson gore had weakened him in the least; an apprehension of unmeasured strength confused and at the same time sustained him as he scrubbed at his ignominious task.

Never gleamed clothes whiter from the hand of the fuller. Unconsciously Rob had put into their cleansing the foretaste and the promise of a consummate physical prowess. The manner in which he hung them on the line, while it portrayed an intense security in the adjustment of the clothespins, indicated, otherwise, some remarkable preoccupation of mind.

Tangled bunches of handkerchiefs and collars waved meekly from their vise-like attachment to the line, no hope of change, no dream of wandering for them. Shirts suspended variously, by the neck, by one arm, by the flap, screamed in the wind as they shook their disordered members menacingly in one another's faces. As twilight advanced—for, by reason of untoward events, Rob's washing had not been finally presented as a spectacle to the world until late in the day—as the shades of evening deepened, and the wind abated not, this ghost-like throng upon the line engaged in wilder antics and drearier hissing of battle; so that, it was said, certain young people from Bear River actually thought it worth their while to climb the steeps and stand peering in painfully suppressed merriment from behind the bunch of firs in order to view the scene.

It was well for Rob that he plodded stoutly on, unconscious of the general interest which attached to this experimentative dawn of his existence; better for him too, that he had not known of the small audience

gathered previously to witness his gloved attack upon the household *ham*, which hung in the back shed.

For, let it be duly narrated, having put out his wash in the manner aforesaid, he had, of meditated and silent purpose, hied him in at the rear door of the shed; had there stood off and aimed so unerring and ferocious a blow at the ham that it did thereupon leap from its hook and pound down with a monstrous noise upon the floor.

Rob, glancing warily about him, and believing himself undetected, proceeded to drive a competent bolt into the rafters, and hung the ham thereon, secured through its tendon with new rope, many stranded and heavily tarred; he then braced off to renew the assault.

Meanwhile, Bate had entered the house with an unaccustomed look of animation, and even almost of good-nature, on his face.

“Say, Ma’y, come on out to the shed. Step careful! S-sh! Now peek in thar’ through the crack.”

Rob, his stage accessories complete, had just entered, as we have said, on the first scene in this new arena. The look he bent upon the ham was haughty, significant, and merciless. He dealt the ham a stunner, and the ham swung back and then returned to reach out swiftly and menacingly after him. Rob retreated a pace with incredible quickness, then darted forward again to strike, all the glory and ambition of those renowned in the ring shining in his eyes. The combat was not unequal on the whole. The ham was deep-salted, tough, and formidable with the sinews of maturity. Where Rob had the advantage of inspired calculation, the ham

had the enduring obstinacy of a creature impervious to suffering or fatigue.

Rob watched his opportunities ever more and more alertly and did buffet the ham right valiantly; until some tired swerve of his wrist caused him to administer a blow that so reacted upon his own knuckles he jumped perpendicularly with the pain of it, and as he descended the ham, too, returned from its flight and fetched him a broadside of punishment that sent him reeling against the meal barrel, to its overthrow and his own accompanying downfall. Sadly, too, he fell on that particular rack of the shed where a setting hen, unthroned by such rude means, bristled her every feather at him with angry maledictions, and even pecked audaciously at his already battered features.

At this point Bate succumbed to a breathless spasm of mirth. Softly he let himself down to earth and rolled over and over with the glee of his emotions, and silently he rolled himself to a safe ground of vantage where he could rise and slink away, leaving Mary as sole occupant of the proscenium box.

Mary indeed remained fascinated at the crack; for the play was not yet done. In the snatch of a breath Rob was up again, and now the ham began to receive a mellowing that would stand by it all its remaining days, to the frying-pan. Though both cause and environment were comical, Rob's face and figure grew actually heroic, as, yielding now not one inch of ground, sending his antagonist thudding back, meeting its rebound, rebound after rebound, with the unerring stroke of his fists, swallowing heedlessly his own pain and weariness until the trick was wholly his, he

felt that the just Powers of the air acknowledged him master of the ring.

"There, sir," said he, stepping away as with a bow from the dying palpitations of his enemy, "I'll give you some more to-morrow, old man. You're a good fighter. Ha! ha! Shake hands. Good-by, till we meet again."

During this adieu Mary had recovered herself and discreetly fled to the house.

The pugilist, very slick as to his hair, and scrupulously clean as to his swollen hands, joined the family at supper. Mary conversed cheerfully with him, a certain animation in her manner as though life, instead of demanding her steady forbearance and patronage, had accorded her a little genuine interest and zest on its own account. Bate thought she was covertly making fun of Rob, and was well satisfied. Rob himself connected her, in his thoughts, with a foreign woman of quality who had once dawned as an honored guest upon his family in the days of his childhood. That woman's dark eyes had both thrilled and chilled him. Women so definably and strikingly handsome are seldom met with; there had been that one, and now there was this one, and Mary Stingaree of Power Lot, God Help Us, had by all odds, he reflected, the more aristocratic beauty and manner of the two.

Rob anticipated her every need at table, was suave, eagerly responsive to every bright word or look of hers.

"He's the rotten fool," thought Bate.

Mary's manner still in some indefinable way pleased and exhilarated Rob as they rose from the table, and

she said quietly, the least ripple of a smile on her mouth:

"Bate tells me, Robert, that you complained about the food."

"No, not that—it's too good for us," Rob cried eagerly; "I made fun, just as you do yourself sometimes, but it was no part of a gentleman, living on your place and on Bate's, to talk as I did; I wish I could take it back, and I beg your pardon, Miss Stingaree. I beg your pardon, Bate. I acted like a cad."

He faced Bate outright, with an honest fullness of apology on his flushed, shamed countenance.

"Oh, don't try ter squeal out of it that way," Bate replied. "I expect to have my reckonin' with you, yit, Daisy," and he turned his back and skulked away as usual.

Mary had, somehow, anticipated or expected the apology on Rob's part, and had hoped to mend matters between the two; but Mary could never anticipate what Bate would say or do. He was a constant surprise to her; and she blushed now even more shamefully than Rob.

"Do not mind him," she said. "He does not mean that."

But her bosom heaved, her nostrils grew thin, and an ominous dark streak showed in the crimson of her cheeks.

"There are three tempers in this house," thought Rob; "mine, and Bate's, and Mary Stingaree's."

"I don't mind," he said. "I deserved a cut. Well, good-night, if you'll excuse me, Miss Stingaree. I—I get so tired I can't hold my head up."

She flashed a smile at him more than kind; it was grateful and it had faith in him. She passed into the next room to her mother. Rob stood a moment and a strange idea dawned upon him. Mary seemed still to stand before him, but the brilliance and force of her, which usually confused him when in her presence, had changed now to only that womanly heaving of the breast. It was not the proud face or the disconcerting eyes that he saw, but the brown shirt-waist, rising and falling with those sweet womanly signals of emotion. That neat brown working-waist of Mary's had a heart under it.

Good heavens, what a heart it might be! What would a caress mean from *such* a woman—from *her*? Rob caught his breath. It could not be; but his very soul followed her through the door behind which she had disappeared. Oh, to dream of it—to put his head down upon that heaving breast as worthy to give and to receive comfort. He shook. It could not be. But—and here it was that poor Rob's lonely and longing soul conceived an idea—he could wash the dishes for her.

He knew that before she brought out her mother's supper tray she always sat for a while with her, talking confidentially and low, soothing and comforting her. The table was not cleared, the dishes, of course, not washed. He had often heard Mary at this task, when his own comfortable head was sinking off into its first delicious slumber of the night.

Now, forthwith, he crept about the room, noiseless as a cat and deft as one inspired; he cleared the table, washed the dishes and set them away, spread the old

red table-cover that converted the kitchen into a sitting-room, replaced the evening lamp, omitting no detail, and was in his own room upstairs before Mary appeared on the scene.

"Virginia!" he heard her calling with a swelling heart of friendship and gratitude from the house door; "Virginia!"

Then Rob knew that Mary had concluded at once that it was Mrs. Byjo who had crept slyly in and done her this favor.

"Come in, Virginia," called the now laughing and urgent voice.

"She won't come, Miss Stingaree," muttered Rob in the silence of his heart. "I don't believe she's anywhere about. Oh, the deuce!" he added to himself; "I kind o' wanted her to know I did it. 'Twould 'a' been fun. But she'll never know; she'll lay it to Byjo, and forget it. I get work enough to do, all right; but somehow I miss all the bouquets. Well, never mind—*she* didn't have to do 'em, anyway; and probably she'd been mad at me if she'd known who it was."

Rob did not read in his room; his business there was emphatically sleeping; insomnia had become the vague reminiscence of some fever in a past world. If he could keep awake until he turned respectably into bed he was only too happy. Magazines and novels he cared little for; and the daily newspapers he could not have. Occasionally he flapped the Bible open, to light, perchance, upon some startling expression, and also because he was very lonely and it was connected with the tender sentimental era of black velvet and golden curls and pony whip.

His eyes full of the sticks of swift oncoming slumber, he flapped it open to-night.

"If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus——"

Rob read no farther; it was a grand phrase, and he clung to it. Some old Bible fellow evidently had put himself in training for a fighter, and this was the fine way he told about it afterwards, casually, without brag or fuss. "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts——"

A good, cool fighter he must have been.

Rob had got up above a complete absorption in the eating, drinking, and reveling phase of existence, to a realization of a stout desire to make a fight. *What* to fight, and what to fight *for*, were buoyantly hazy in his calculations. The fellow in the Bible, of course, had fought for religion; *he* could not do that, but all the same he meant to make a superb showing and a tremendous slaughter among the "beasts at Ephesus."

CHAPTER IX

AN EGG FOR A STAMP

ALAS for the tawny-haired hero of the ring! With the morning light the thrill of the combat and the glory of the amphitheater had dwindled down to a smarting consciousness of a bruised body; down to a sordid summons to arise and toil, conveyed through the cackling of geese and the bleating of calves; down, in fact, to ax and saw, and spade and hoe, and other things that are but dull accompaniments to the picture of an aspiring champion.

Mary was afraid to embitter Bate, and do Rob actual harm in consequence, by engaging in any lively tone of pleasantry or showing even a frankly natural politeness to their guest; so the same studied courtesy as usual prevailed between her and Rob at the breakfast table.

"Did Mrs. Byjo—I mean, Stafford—call last evening?" Rob inquired cursorily, with great lightness and cheerfulness of manner.

"Yes," Mary laughed; "she came in a mysterious way the dishes to perform. When I came out from Mother's room everything had been done for me; and it is not the first time," she added, "that Virginia has done me so kind a turn."

"She's a brick," said Rob heartily.

Bate sniffed. The world seemed ever to be drawing

upon the well of Marah within him, and he, most uncannily, seemed always to know what was going on in all the small affairs of life.

"Byjo never done your dishes last night," he declared.

"Who, then?" said Mary, regarding him hopefully; "did you, Bate?"

"Me? No."

"Well, then—who?"

"The prize-fighter, thar'; and I wouldn't thank him for his imperdence, either."

Mary blushed. Rob reveled in her look; but at that point he lost her. He did not follow her purpose to shield and save him, but saw only the cool and quiet smile which hovered about her lips.

"Ah, now I understand," she said,—“though it must seem ungrateful,—the great rim of grease left around the inside of the dishpan.”

Bate cast so sharp and triumphant a glance of warning at him that Rob almost felt in washing the dishes, though he could still vividly recall the impulses of hopeless love and holy kindness which had abounded in him at the time, that he had given serious ground for offense. There are rites of conduct for human observation in Power Lot, as elsewhere, and possibly he had arrogated to himself too much of the privilege of the domestic and familiar. Anyway, Bate had exposed him, and brought contempt upon him; and now he did not leave the table as usual, but sat regarding Mary and Rob in an insultingly watchful manner.

Rob excused himself, and sighed deeply as he stepped outside the door. His clothes on the line! Alas, for

the strain and rigor of immortal combat—it had fallen to this; Rob must take down his own clothes. And, that Bate, watching from some source, would devour with delight this savory morsel of his discomfiture, he felt sure.

Rob filled his pipe—he had only one drawing of molasses-and-ginger tobacco left, by the way—sauntered up with his hands in his pockets, and attacked the line. But how white they were! Water and the stern drubbing of the board, and the winds of adversity which had blown all night upon them, had made them how wondrous sweet. Rob condescended to take a little pride in them at last, in his own heart; outwardly his ears were suffused with blushes as he folded them on the grass preparatory to carrying them in and packing them away.

Hereafter, a flannel shirt or two, with a few adjuncts by way of handkerchiefs and stockings, would represent his labors at the washtub and his soldiery of the line.

He wanted very much to have a little interview with Mary; in the first place for the sake of the painful and pleasurable excitement of being near her, and in the second place because his finances had reached an ebb—as witness the one pipe-drawing of tobacco remaining to him—where it was imperatively necessary for him to propound a frank business proposition to her. Just as he was making his return passage through the kitchen having put away his linen, Bate suddenly appeared with an affected preoccupation of haste and began fumbling among the bric-a-brac on the kitchen shelf in search of something, no one knew what.

Rob, disregarding his presence, stood in the center of the floor, and spoke with dignity and self-possession:

"Miss Stingaree, do you mind my getting you a mess of clams, instead of your hiring Joey Belcher to do it?"

"Why, of course not, Robert; but don't you need the time for your own work?"

"I will explain," said Robert, the flower of his courtliest drawing-room grace shining full upon him; "I have written to New York for funds, but Captain James Turbine's boat is not yet in with the mails, and my present financial condition, to tell you the truth, Miss Stingaree, is one of absolute penury; in fact, if penury means anything like *penny*, I haven't even that. I vow to you it would give me the proudest pleasure to dig the clams for you for nothing; and if you will permit me to have that pleasure I will regard the ten cents, which you usually pay Joey Belcher for digging a peck, as only a temporary loan, and shall feel grateful and very honored to reimburse you when I receive my funds."

Bate, from an expression of dumb wonderment, chuckled, as he renewed his frantic pawing over the kitchen shelf.

"He's out o' tobackker."

Between the two of them Mary was hard put to it to keep her countenance. She knew that no funds would be forthcoming to Rob from New York; it was in the strict letter of the physician's bond that Rob should be brought face to face with the utter realities of life, and either prove his crass weakness or struggle up and stand on his own feet, morally erect.

It seemed hard to her. He was so good-natured. It

had touched her in a way that he did not dream of—his washing the dishes for her. Bate made her friendly relations with her big ward more difficult still through his insane jealousy and moodiness. But Rob's present elegance of manner cast a glamour over all things, made them appear hopeful, even joyful. It was not so sure but that, in some sense, in place of her bewitching him he was bewitching her, her life-training had been so practical and severe, and he was, at present at least, even with his appeal for money, the very soul of chivalrous romance.

Mary could not help smiling when he brought his request to a peroration.

"Very well," she answered; "we will not consider it as a loan, but I shall be very glad to pay you ten cents if you will dig some clams."

Rob bowed. He had devoutly hoped that she would understand and offer payment in advance; then he could stop at the River on his way back from the flats and purchase some tobacco; it would save him another long trip up and down the hill. To do Mary justice, she did not fully diagnose his predicament. He said nothing more. Ceaseless physical exertion was becoming second nature to him, and he had observed that the strange mechanism of his body, after a few moments of quiet, if strenuously put to labor and plentifully bedewed with sweat, limbered up again to the tune of untiring action. Occasionally he reflected in blank astonishment on his health and vigor, and still the latent purpose of his untrained pleasure-loving nature was to go rollicking back to New York as soon as opportunity offered, and expend his accrued treas-

ures of deep-breathing lungs and toughening muscles, in having a tremendously, a superlatively, "good time."

And now he took up clam-rake and basket, descended by the steep road, which was shorter and had ceased, some time ago, to thrill him with affright; walked sturdily to the flats, dug up the clams, tramped back and delivered his spoils to Mary, and received his ten cents. Mrs. Byjo was with her, and hilariously, with an air of good fellowship, as he retreated threw several bad clams after him as a reminder to be more particular in future in his selection of those bivalves.

So homesick for company was Rob, it seemed nice even to have things thrown at him, and at a safe distance, he tossed a loud, though expressly tender, kiss back at Virginia, and proceeded cheerfully on his way down the hill again.

At the River store he purchased his usual ten-cent plug of tobacco and filled his pipe, standing outside in the center of activity created by a confused street scene consisting of one yoke of oxen and two men, and—yes, that was Cuby coming. Cuby knew the proprieties and the tenets of choice society; she did not look at Rob as she stepped lightly past, her head well up, and her look communicating with the far edge of the horizon.

Rob flattered himself with the happy thought that she expected him to follow. There at least, he felt, as he watched her trim, smart figure disappearing, was something tangibly human to get hold of, and he was lonely beyond utterance for genial companionship.

"You do loaf," she suddenly admonished him with

motherly displeasure, when his footsteps pounded too plainly at her side to be ignored any longer. "You work not, you make to loaf by the store."

"Now see here, Cuby, I *don't* loaf. It just happened. I haven't stopped to breathe before in a dog's age."

Rob puffed at his pipe choicely, cautiously; even this despised quality of the weed had grown to be of precious savor to him.

"Just look," he continued, "at what I've been through with to get a plug of this nasty tobacco. Twice up and down that eternal hill to earn ten cents for such a luxury as this. Me—I—that they used to call 'the Hilton heir' at home. Say, this is a great world, Cuby, and has got lots of entertaining stuff in it. I mean to make other folks laugh out of the wrong sides of their mouth, sometime. Ha! ha! Ho! ho!"

Do his best, Rob could not muster up a malicious laugh. It might have been the wealth of ozone in the atmosphere, but his wild cachinnation had a distinctly joyous tone.

"My father says," replied Cuby significantly, "I shall never marry any man w'at is lezzy."

"Quite right. For that very reason you'd be mighty lucky if you could catch me. I'm the goods, all right. Sweat! Don't say a word. All the arrears on my board bill paid up! Square with the world! The Stingaree potatoes are ahead of mine, so I put in extra time at the usual wages helping hoe them. I haven't ironed yet, but I've done a big washing. Sawin' wood, choppin' wood, diggin', hoein', clammin'—and, say, I've laid Bate flat."

This revelation was unwise, and it had occurred to Rob as only a remarkable item among his various toils.

Cuby's manner changed.

"No. You have lick' Bate? You have?" she cried eagerly.

Rob expanded with the momentum of her excitement and asserted furthermore with reckless high-mindedness:

"Ask Miss Stingaree; ask Captain Byjo—*she* saw him on the ground, and me over him telling him to beg for mercy."

"Oh, Rob!" Cuby sighed an ecstatic long breath and put a hand on his shoulder, and her brown eyes looked into his.

Rob was electrified, and he felt of a size that matched, not unfavorably, with the surrounding mountains. Ozone is as treacherous as whisky to the blood of any gay reveler who has not learned how to hold himself in hand.

"If it is hones' an' true that you have lick' Bate," said Cuby solemnly, "then they shall not any more call you 'Daisy,' no. And my father, he will show you to box with the gloves. He has it well learn'. He shall make a laugh at them, an' show you."

"Will he?" cried Rob, his hands twitching to begin lessons.

"Sure. Yes. But, Rober', you make yourself foolish to work so har-r-rd for so little of pay. Why do you not *mek* them that is rich off you, send you the money? Why not?"

"That is just where your dear little head is level, my sweet girl. But don't you see they've got me in

a trap. I couldn't buy a foot of standing room, even on one of those old rotten wood-packets; and they're so connivin' mean together—and I believe Cap'n Jim Turbine's at the bottom of it—they wouldn't sell me a berth, even if I had the money. Besides, they never sail, anyway, and the vessels that do come in sneak in and out like thieves. Don't you see where I am? I'm going to put it in the geography: What is Robert Hilton? (Answer) He's a poor cuss surrounded by water."

Cuby laughed. There was no question but that Rob was growing witty as well as valiant. She laughed so admiringly that Rob, reflecting a bit on his own brilliancy, followed suit:

"Ho! ho! Ha! ha!"

"Yes. Me—I remember," gurgled Cuby through her merriment; "I mek study of the geography at the Baptis' school. But now there is come a new par-r-rt to it: 'What is Rober' Hilton?' The pupils make to answer: 'He is one poor cuss all surround' with water.' Yes."

Then her face grew very serious.

"You shall not go away. My father will kill you if you go away. You make promise to me we are engage' to each other. If you go away—though I said not much that I love you, they make such a laugh at me—you shall take me with you. That is sure. Yes. No, you shall not go. But write them the letters. See? Make the big thr-r-reat at them. Scar-r-re them."

The asperity of Cuby's lovely glowing face was enough to send fits of dismay through any corporate body of malefactors.

Rob's heart sank a bit at the information that he was indissolubly bound to Cuby; not but that she was perfectly entrancing, but the marriage tie seemed a knotty problem altogether out of his province at present. With an embarrassed laugh he relegated it to either the dark forward or backward abysms of time, just wherever it might happen to light, making only the mental reservation that he would be rather more careful hereafter in his attitude toward the smart, tempestuous little maiden at his side.

"Letters, Cuby," he declared gravely; "why, I've written letters enough, but I never get any answer. I know this about Captain Jim Turbine—mean as he is, he's honest. He would bring my letters over from Waldeck if any came. No, they won't answer me; however, I've got a missive here in my pocket that I've been carrying about with me, that I'm going to send first boat. I reckon it 'll make 'em sit up. It's a hair-raiser."

So prominently did this intention now absorb Rob's mind, he sought me out as soon as his stroll with Cuby was over.

"When are you going to give me a sail over to Waldeck, Captain Turbine?" he inquired, his broad smile indicating that he would esteem it over every earthly privilege to become my bosom friend.

There are some people you yearn over. They may be vain or silly, or worse; but there's some quality about them makes you yearn over them. So my old fool of a heart yearned over that sad boy; but I was under rules along with Mary and the doctor.

"Well, that's kind o' difficult to say, Mr. Hilton,"

I answered; "wind and tide, and all that, have so much to do with it, you know."

"Wind and tide don't faze *you*. I wish you'd call me 'Rob,' Captain. *Why*, now, I wonder, won't you sail me over, Jim? Are you afraid I won't pay you?"

"No, oh no, Rob; but I sail under quick orders when I do go."

"'Orders,—why, you own your own vessel and are master of it.'"

"Well,"—I had to smile,—“I make strict orders on myself, all the same. I'm awful careful, Rob, to obey my own orders.”

"Pshaw. You can do what you like."

"Maybe, then, it's because I'm so old and rough and used to it, but I like it better to be under orders."

"You lose all the fun," said Rob, a little impatiently.

"Not a bit. I've been through seas, and sheered off rocks, that 'ud call a circus tame, and put a picnic nowhere."

"Oh, I know you're a fast sailor, Jim; and, say," he added, in a confidential tone, wheedling sweetly, "you are not old, you're hardly in your prime. Now look here, Captain, you sail some of the other boys over, now and then—why won't you take *me*? I'd lay around shore waiting to take my chances. I'd lay around all night and all day, and a *week*, if I could get the chance to go when you do sail." He was wide awake on his subject; he had infused a wild pathetic tremor into his voice. It was hard; it was harder on me than on him.

"Well," said I, turning my head away, "when the right time comes that I can take ye, I'll let ye know, Rob."

"Thanks," he sighed heavily, walked away a rod or so, then returned with a great air of having been reminded of something:

"By the way—this letter, Captain; do you mind posting it for me, the next time you sail over?"

I knew the letter would not make any difference with the way he was being treated by that old doctor in New York, and I knew that no money would be sent to him right away to leave Power Lot, God Help Us. I had not the least objections to taking the letter, and I longed to do it without a word more. There was no postage stamp on it. It seemed an infinitesimal small thing, and worse for Rob's nature to think people could be so mean. But rules are rules, and especially promises—even as to a penny—are promises. Poor Mary had been bound to it sacredly, "even a penny" having been mentioned in particular, and I ought to be up to her endurance; besides, my promise had been made through *her*. That settled it. It should stand. So I steeled myself up to the business.

"Where's the little picture of some imperial sovereign or other, that belongs in the corner of it?" I said.

What a look those blue eyes gave me. I think he saw through me, and I think he pitied me and believed in me, though he did not know what for nor why.

He dived into his pockets with an artificially off-hand and impetuous manner.

"Thunder," said he, "I've left all my change at home."

I had become absorbed, apparently, in some tinkering I was doing on my boat, and to confirm my mental aloofness from the dilemma in hand I had begun to whistle.

"Look here, Jim," he grinned, "I've been ass enough to leave all my change up at the house."

His air of bravado was transparent; my manner of indifference was as loudly transparent. I made no reply.

"Good Lord," he blurted out, "if I had a hundred dollars right here, I'd give it to you, Jim, for the asking."

"I know you would, Rob," said I. "I know that right well." Again his impatient glance changed to a frank and unfathomable pity.

"Say, old man, money's kind o' scarce around here, ain't it? Well, I'm going to attend to this little matter, right now."

He went back up the hill (at a very different gait from that he had exhibited on his first arrival at Power Lot, God Help Us); and how he should get the penny for a stamp he did not know, but it seemed incredible to him that Fate should face him out with denial and disaster in so small an enterprise.

Just then he heard the fruitful cackling of a hen, and lo, escape from the clutch of impecuniosity lay open before him, though it led through the clandestine and abhorrent paths of theft. Rob darted in at the rear door of the shed, and looked over into the hen's nest nearest at hand.

There lay four eggs in an enticing cluster, and, at present prices, one of them would buy a stamp. Into Rob's pocket went an egg, and down he came to me, holding out letter and egg, his mouth as wide abeam with laughter as though Sin had not claimed him for her own.

"I swiped it, Jim, 'pon my honor. Say, Lord Harry—look where I've got—I've stolen an egg."

The look of it, indeed. A man of his majesty of size and classic beauty of feature shaking that purloined egg in wicked and hilarious triumph before my very eyes. I laughed till my sides ached. His moral restitution would not be reached through *me*. I had failed, myself, in this bout with the ordained ethics of the law; the ludicrous side of the thing had done me up.

"Now, will you post my letter?"

"Sure. Hand her over. I'm not sure but I'll make a special trip."

"Oh, say—take me along."

"Likely. Sailing over to Waldeck with a henroost thief. Not much." But the tears of helpless laughter still swam in my eyes.

"Go alone, then, you old weepin'-willow, and be hung to you," said Rob; but there was honest love as well as wild gayety in his tone. A joke has, sometimes, a sort of strange saving power over folks.

He lifted his hat ceremoniously from the crisp handsome waves of his hair:

"Good-day, Captain Turbine. By God,"—he turned on me once more, warningly, and his eyes flashed,—“I'll sail with you yet, Jim.”

My cap went off. “Good-day, Brother Bob, and it will be a glad day for me when you sail with me.”

CHAPTER X

THE PASSAGE THROUGH

ROB, in his mad haste, had not discovered that Miss Stingaree was sitting, slightly shadowed by a pile of material objects, in a corner of the shed, peeling rhubarb, when he thrust his predatory hand into the hen's nest.

As he returned this third time from the shore, sucking parsimoniously at his pipe, Mary saw him through the house windows; tall, erect, brown, so that the waving fair hair, growing tawnier every day through exposure to the wind and sun, looked stirringly picturesque beside the deepening tan of his countenance—as she saw this goodly spectacle, and then reflected on the stolen hen's egg, her heart revolted that so comely an exterior should contain a soul of such mean dimensions.

Rob unconsciously mended his case at once, as, seeing her within, he entered hat in hand frankly smiling:

“Miss Stingaree, you harbor a thief—a petty thief. I abstracted an egg from old ‘Ginger’s’ nest and applied it to my own private necessities.”

She smiled back at him with a happy revulsion of feeling, and her rare laugh encircled him with a sense of bliss.

“Were you hungry, Robert? Where did you go to boil it?”

“Oh, it wasn't quite so groveling as that, Miss Stin-

garee. I gave it to Captain Turbine to be converted into a postage stamp. Ho! ho! Ha! ha!"

"So you still want to get away from us?" she said, and her lip drew a little as if with mortification and pain. "I cannot blame you, but I hoped you would not mind it to stay awhile."

What he had written in his letter, of the sordid and poverty-stricken conditions of Power Lot, of disreputable Bate, of outlandish Mrs. Byjo, even of Mary's coldness and pride (instead of lauding her hard-working, faithful performance of duty)—and the disagreeable way in which he had written it—it all surged back upon him now, as if he had lifted his hand to strike the beautiful woman before him a cruel and brutal blow.

"Well," blushed Rob, "I feel that I'm an awful burden, don't you know, that's a fact; and I feel besides that there is tremendously urgent business of my own back in the States, that I ought to attend to."

As Mary looked at him this statement did not seem farcical, as it certainly would have appeared when he first arrived at Power Lot. His powers of recuperation seemed nothing less than inspired; and she made up her mind that she would herself write, recommending his release from her low roof and mean fare—and from Bate.

"Perhaps you ought to go," she said.

"Oh, Miss Stingaree, will you write and advise them? It's scandalous, their keeping me here."

"Yes, I will write."

"It isn't because I want to leave you," said Bob; "but—but perhaps it would be wisest on that account, too. For I—I think you're grand, you know; and I

might get to liking you more—more”—he did not look at her—“more than you would wish to have me like you.”

“Your affections are so broadly scattered about, Robert,” said Mary quietly and kindly, “that I should feel very sorry if I did not come in for some share of them.”

“You mean Cuby Tee-bo,” he blurted out. “A man can’t live without *any* society, and she’s an amusing little girl, that’s all.”

Mary flashed a look at him; it was evident that her liking for *him* was limited and under strict control.

“I’ve never been a saint, you know,” Bob defended himself. “I’d try to be—I’d try for anything, if *you’d* stand by me and encourage me.”

“If you mean that you would like to have me respect you,” she replied, “honestly, I should not be able to do that until you could stand by yourself.”

“Don’t you think that’s kind o’ lonesome?” said Rob, pale, and gazing afar through the window.

“Try it, and see,” she answered. Rob thought her tone implied that there might be unguessed spiritual rewards in the stalwart attitude she had recommended; but the prospect was hazy to him, and especially unattractive. His face was dreary.

“Well, I must go to work,” he sighed. “One thing,” he added, in a hopeful and unresentful tone, “when I get hold of a few pennies again, I’ll hug ’em up and kiss ’em a while, an’ get kind o’ used to the looks of ’em, before I spend ’em—that’s sure. I never sailed so close to the wind before, and it’s awful.”

His mouth trembled a little, but not weakly. He

looked Mary straight in the face without appeal or reproach; only with a sort of resigned adoration.

"Well," he repeated sadly, "I must be off to work."

"Mrs. Stafford says she would be very glad to hire you to assist some with *her* hoeing. You could put in a little time there, perhaps, before your own potatoes are ready."

"If I help Bate four hours this afternoon, I shall be two days ahead on my board, shan't I, Miss Stingaree?"

"Yes." Mary was secretly delighted, the question showed such close mental application and correct figuring on Rob's part.

"Then, to-morrow morning," he went on, "I can get another lap ahead on my board, and in the afternoon I'll help Captain Byjo—I mean Mrs. Stafford; and she will pay me the same you do?—only she will pay me in cash, of course?"

"You can depend upon her to do so."

"Miss Stingaree," said Bob ingratiatingly, with a little catch in his throat, "I'm a 'hired man'; that's the size of it."

"You can make it any size you like," observed Mary. She hesitated a moment, then added distinctly, "I do not know of anyone with greater opportunities, for you have not only the power to build a strong character now, but to do it in spite of, and over, an—unfortunate past, which is harder, and greater; and if you remained a 'hired man' through the whole business, *that* would not make any difference."

Rob again asserted simply that the world looked rather lonely; again he withdrew his sad gaze, and remarked in a stupefied sort of way without rancor:

"When I've earned the penny that I owe you for old Ginger's egg, of course I will pay it back to you."

"Well," said Mary. Her smile drew him; he found himself looking straight into her eyes again, and, in spite of the smile, or through it, they seemed to him to be very grave and kind and beautiful. "I do not think," she said, "that I am at heart petty or stingy. I think if you would believe that you would not be mistaken."

"Lord, I know it," cried Rob. "You do, for love's sake and charity's sake, what *I* would never do. And old Jim—Captain Turbine, I mean—he's got some fad or other for acting mean and stingy. You're both playing at it, but I guess I know. Don't you ever think but what I do."

"Captain Turbine," assented Mary, "is a Don Quixote."

"No," cried Rob, "he's a real knight, marked genuine—all but the trimmings, helmet, shield and mail. He doesn't wear any mail, and, confound him, he doesn't bring me any mail. Ho, ho! Ha, ha!"

Mary acknowledged the brilliance of his jest with a gay laugh of her own.

Just then Mrs. Stingaree's cane rapped sharply from her bedside to the floor in the closed bedroom.

"Everybody has left me," called the old woman; and immediately her tortured sense of endurance gave way to the shrill tones that were beginning to dominate the diseased brain. "Come in here, somebody. Come and sit with me," she called raspingly. "That Robert Hilton said he would come—but he never came."

Mary started instantly for the door. Rob saw everywhere about the signs of the unfinished housework which he had interrupted, and a pang of shame went to his soul, that he had never fulfilled his promise to sit sometimes with the afflicted woman.

"Let me go." He advanced to Mary eagerly. "She asked for me. Let me go in and sit with her."

He knocked at the door. "It is Robert Hilton," he announced in his clear voice. "I am coming in to sit with you a while, if you will allow me."

That hearty, singularly glad voice seemed to delight and soothe the old woman.

"Come in, dear," she said; "they all neglect me, they all desert me."

"You know Miss Stingaree has such a lot to do, to get meals for us fellows, and all; for my part, I feel ashamed to have her work so for me," said the cheerfully confidential Rob, taking a chair at her bedside.

"Mary is a good girl—a good girl," said the old woman, beginning to weep; "but my head tears me—here it comes again."

Rob took her hand in his. There had grown to be an exceedingly firm as well as gentle quality in his once flaccid touch; and his well-featured, sunny, ingenuous face added to the general reposefulness of his presence.

"Smoke your pipe if you want to, Honey," said the old woman.

"Would you like it better if I did?" Rob asked, willing to sacrifice his hoarded tobacco at a lady's command; though, marvelous to relate, not in the mood for smoking just now.

"Yes, I would like it better," she avowed, shrewdly guessing that he would stay longer with her if he had the pipe for solace. Rob drew his old clay pipe from his pocket, ostentatiously managed that her hand should accidentally touch it for assurance, and put it between his teeth, but he had not lit it. Faithfully again he took her outstretched hand in his. She gazed with her sightless eyes at his clear-cut quiet face; he gazed out of the open window.

Beyond, there lay the many waters, and the "Gut," through which swept in the profound tides from the Bay of Fundy. In another direction lay the river and its hamlet surrounded by its dramatic steep. Rob, though prisoned in a limited and temporary sense, felt the throb of all human possibilities in his veins. Some time—some time soon, in his young life, he should "make out," beyond the Basin, beyond the Bay, and into the cities and the ways of men again. But this poor palsied creature whose hand he held, for her there was only one more journey—that brief one, from her bed to those white stones down on the hillside.

The sublime view, which had so uncomfortably impressed Rob at first (not but that he had traveled in his time and glanced, between puffs of his cigarette, at highly recommended scenery—before the luxuries of New York City had become his confirmed and exclusive habit)—the sublimity of the view was becoming rather a friendly object to him.

He faced it almost always now, instead of turning his back upon it. Some of the sunsets even lured him to stand and look off as absorbedly as if at a theater. Now and then the panoply of nature was so startling and

so gorgeous he actually forgot to close his admiring and astonished mouth as he stood gazing.

"What ye gappin' at?" Bate, passing with the milk pail, had inquired contemptuously on one such occasion.

There glowed in the west such a riot of color, of fiery horses of the sun, of purple-rimmed cloud chariots, traveling along a highway all golden-paved, over there—and all in plain sight of miserable Power Lot, God Help Us.

"What am I gaping at?" said Rob, half turning his head, in his matter-of-fact way. "Say, just look off yonder, Bate—what do you think of that?"

"Middle o' June, and a January wind to the nor'-west'ard," growled Bate; "freeze our crops to-night, and we'll have to plant all over ag'in too late—that's what I think."

Rob's jaw had dropped.

Bate jeered.

"Does that business over thar' look so purty to ye, now?"

"Why, yes," said Rob, though a look of anxiety and disappointment had settled on his face. "I can't discount anything on the grandeur of 'that business over there.'"

But now—as he sat by poor Mrs. Stingaree's bed—he was thinking of the possibilities of a bright future for himself after all, as set against her brief fateful journey to the gravestones on the hillside.

Then he thought of Mary. In her speech she was always letting drop things that made a man think; he had sat spell-bound, once, down at the River, on the back seat of the Baptist meetinghouse, where she had

elected simply to hand in her "testimony" with the rest. She believed in God, actually, this sensible, keen woman; believed in Him with her whole soul, practically and forthrightly.

And she believed that the journey from the bed to the white stones on the hillside was *not* the end of all. She seemed to regard it as a minor affair, and unrelated to the soul, which had great enterprises on hand. Her conception of existence and the grandeur of being were as vast as the universe she beheld; leading beyond the "Gut," as it were the strait of death, into infinite bays of achievement and to undreamed-of shores of peace.

These thoughts were confusing, dizzying, to Rob, as once the physical landscape now spread before his eyes had been.

He fell asleep in his chair. Mrs. Stingaree, holding his hand, had fallen into a sleep as childlike. In his sleep Rob saw the sick woman rise from her bed and start off on her journey, out into the wind and sunshine; and the apple blossoms fell upon her. But she did not stop at the tombstones. She seemed not to see them. She went on and on—and very clearly he saw her. She crossed the nearer waters that seemed neither to touch nor dismay her, and wonderfully she entered the mighty tide surging in through the "Gut"; yet was she not troubled or overwhelmed by it, but waved her hand to him from afar, smiling.

Bate looked in at the door and saw his mother, quietly asleep, her withered hand held fast in Rob's; and Rob, asleep, with his head on his breast, his old clay pipe clasped in the other roughened hand. Bate's face

showed only a stupid wonder, but he closed the door softly as he crept away.

Mary came later, and as she glanced at her mother's face a sharp look crossed her own. She pressed forward and put her lips to her mother's forehead. It was cold. There was no awakening.

"It has reached her heart! She has gone. Mother—mother, dear!" She took the lifeless form in her arms.

Rob slept almost as soundly as the dead.

"Robert," cried Mary, "she has gone!"

"Why, yes—yes, *Mary*," said the bewildered Rob, rubbing his eyes, "I saw her go." And his languid head drooped again to slumber.

"Robert, the disease has reached her heart—so suddenly, and stilled it. She has gone! Mother!"

"Why, yes," said Rob, still stupidly. "I saw her go."

"What do you mean? Mother is dead!"

Rob, his blue eyes vacuous to earth and still enamored of his living dream, pointed down the way of the apple blossoms, and beyond, to the swelling tide. "She went over that way, honor bright. I saw her. The tide did not seem rough to her. She did not mind the passage through."

Rob came to his senses. He saw only Mary's eyes, the tears on her white cheeks. She regarded him strangely for a moment; then she spoke, quietly, with quivering lips:

"I am glad that you saw her when she went, Robert. I am glad that the tide did not seem rough to her—that she did not mind the passage through."

CHAPTER XI

ANOTHER HILL

ROB told it over to small interested groups in Power Lot, afterward.

"Strange that she should go—so nice—just as I sat down with her, or, rather soon as we got to sleep. I was tired as a dog. I slept like doom. But I saw her go. Just the time she died, too. Honor bright, saw her just as plain as I see you."

Rob assented entirely, in a matter-of-fact way, to the proposition that he "had dreamed." But his intellectual processes were not complex, and there was in him an incipient idealism, buried in the past sensual submergence of his existence, which now shot up a little bud of promise able to stand by itself and as literal, to his sense, as the common daylight.

Always, to his own consciousness, in his first thought of Mrs. Stingaree's passing, he believed that he had *seen her go*; and it was a demonstration of Mary's faith in such matters. Mary was a marvelous woman—a conviction that grew within him more and more as, with the time she had for normal sleep since her mother's death, and the time, too, to improve herself and her surroundings, the old barracks in which they lived began to wear an atmosphere attractive and even pitifully elegant.

Rob, with an added awe of manner, exchanged his boots for his slippers at the house door. Bending

over on the doorstep on one occasion unlacing his boots—his face red with the sacred urgency of his cause—Bate, who frequently marched in mud-shod, accosted him:

“Doin’ that ’cause ye’re afraid o’ a woman’s tongue, Daisy?”

“No, Smartweed,” retorted Rob, “I’m doing it because I’m a gentleman.”

“Then, if you’re one, I don’t never want to be one,” said Bate, with such deep emphasis that the remark stuck, and in due time Rob fell a-thinking.

How much was known of his past history he had never asked. To be sure, he had come to Power Lot, God Help Us, drunk and sodden. To be sure, he was compromised, in Cuby’s sense of the term, by certain light and reckless professions of love made to her; but that was within the bounds of gentlemanly conduct, he considered. To be sure, his heart was turning to Mary with love and adoration combined. No one knew it, he believed. The growing realization was a joy and an inspiration to his own consciousness; it flattered his faint moral sense. To love such a woman surely indicated the man of honor. And, some time, he might win her?—that trembling hope shed its far-reaching glow over his sordid labors—his secret.

But the divining instincts of humanity are keen. Bate knew, and bitterly advised Cuby Tee-bo to have an eye on her lover. And Mary knew, to her sorrow. This personal equation was what she determined, particularly, to eliminate from the problem. Rob’s mounting blushes when near her, his avid eagerness to anticipate all her small wishes, and the blue eyes falling be-

fore hers; these things touched her with shame and indignation. She addressed him seldom, and more shortly, her eyes meeting his frankly with a confirmed indifference—and only so much the more poor Rob adored her.

Then, one morning as he was hoeing his own potatoes very early, Gar' Tee-bo made a detour across the fields on his way to the woods, and accosted him over the fence.

“I weesh you come down and make play our gemm wiz the gloves again. You too tam stupeed.” He smiled fatherly on Rob, with a pleasant duplicity. “Say, you come to-night; we make play our leetle gemm togezzer, eh?”

“Yes, I will come,” said Rob.

He went that evening. The wiry Frenchman gave him so clear an insight into some new features of the “gemm” that Rob, sitting on the kitchen floor with his back against the wall, trying to collect his scattered breath, felt that he could have dispensed with such telling proficiency on the part of the doughty Frenchman.

But Cuby laughed.

“You naughty man, to make hurt my pretty Daisy,” she said.

Rob was up in a twinkling, springing at Tee-bo with savage fury.

Gar' met him. “You t'ink you spill me lak you spill tam fool, Bet' Sting'ree, eh? You t'ink you fall over an' squash me, eh? Fedder-Bed you, take dat.”

But Rob, whom excessive passion seemed to imbue with skill, caught the Frenchman's trick, and Gar' went

over as the result of a stinging blow in turn; and Cuby, whose hope was secretly with her lover, rushed in between them.

"Do you quit, father. Rob,—he play' fair. Let him alone. Quit you both. Hear to me."

The combatants after surveying each other like two panting dogs submitted to be led to chairs, each by the hand of Cuby. She, with sparkling eyes, innocent enough in her simple jealousy and folly, by all means to win back her lover, produced a jug of rum and shook it gladsomely in the faces of the two.

"Where you t'ink I got *heem*, eh?" said Gar', taking the jug and now beaming cordially on Rob.

Rob saw a vision of green worlds of exceeding brightness and heights of exceeding valor fleeting past him out of his reach; and in their place was a miserable, low room and a dirty deal-table, and on that table had been placed a jug of rum.

"Where you t'ink I got *heem*, eh?" repeated the Frenchman, pointing at the jug. "I tell you how I got *heem*. No—I nevaire tell you. You riform. You keep str'et. You riform an' marry my Cuby an' keep yourself stiddy. I don' want no tam lezzy d'unkard 'roun' here. But, to-night, eh?—because you play good gemm, tam good gemm—you get yourself treat, frien'ly togezzer, eh?"

Gar' filled a glass and handed it to Rob with beaming confidence, and Cuby's questioning, delighted eyes were on him too. He drank it, eagerly, and received another.

Now poor little Cuby's benighted work was all cut out for her, by herself and her less intelligent father.

While Rob sat up, hilarious and extremely voluble, on the house-bench, Gar', who had not imbibed so freely, went out and sought the local justice of the peace for the purpose of having Rob and Cuby married.

But the same smuggled invoice of rum, a jug of which adorned Gar's table, had laid low the justice of the peace; and his wife, with a cheerful and exculpating wink, pointed him out, lying half dressed on his bed, devoting himself to the business of snoring with a vigor which precluded the possibility of his adapting himself to any other pursuit.

Captain Belcher, however, though elated, was in so active a case as to be willing to stick at nothing—not even the hitherto unattempted performance on his part of uniting two people in marriage. With great impressiveness of manner he now conducted this rite, kissed the bride with effusion, and gave Rob a jocose congratulatory push, which, with another glass from the jug, confirmed the latter in the intention which he had been for some time cherishing of disposing himself on the floor for a season of undiverted slumber. This cherished desire he now put into execution. It was morning when he opened his heavy eyelids.

Ah, those hills of conquest, those fair fields of achievement, which had gone fleeting past him in his vision,—past him, out of sight. He lay on Gar' Tee-bo's floor, and through the open door he saw the gully of the river at low tide. The flats lay cavernous and bare. Despair swept over him; he wished no single thing except that he were dead.

Cuby rose equal to the occasion. She was up early, fresh as the morn, resplendent in a starched pink frock.

Steaming hot coffee awaited Rob and her father, and a pan of fried trout besides some muffins made by her own skillful little hands.

"See what a stupid old man I have," she cried, gayly cuffing Rob on the ear; "he make me ashem', lak we was married to a funeral."

"'Married'!" exclaimed Rob dully, from his end of the breakfast table.

Gar' laughed boisterously:

"He forgit how he mek you to marry heem, Cuby. He have such tam good time to that weddeen-party, he forgit all what he done. Ha, ha!"

Rob looked at Cuby. She nodded her pretty head at him in confirmation, her bright eyes tender and at the same time challenging him to show a becoming joy. The glory of beauty and of health was upon her, and Rob was again for the time being mentally and physically a waste. He put his hands up to his head and groaned, very simply.

"I have been a fool—a fool! Oh, why did I touch it?"

Neither Cuby nor her father seemed to resent this unflattering attitude and speech. They applied kindly and soothing words. They affirmed it as their desire that Cuby should remain at present with her father to keep his house; while Rob should continue living at the Stingarees' for convenience to his farm. Later, he might come into the interrupted wealth that was rumored still to be his; or, at least, when his potato crop was sold in the Fall they might rent a barracks of their own.

Gar' even knew of several desirable places of this

sort, and indicated their direction through the window with his dirty forefinger. Rob's soul went sick.

"I want to be on the hill," he said fretfully; "there are places enough up there."

"You use' to that hill, you lak' that hill," replied the Frenchman genially; "you git use' to the River, you lak' the River—see?"

"No," cried Rob belligerently. "I tell you I'm going to live on the hill."

"Why, of course," said Cuby soothingly; "me—I wan' to live on the hill, too. We shall live where we make to please ourselves, Father." But there was a little spark of malice in her eye; it was so evident that her presence did not make hills and vales a matter of indifference to Rob. She had caught her handsome man, and lost him—she, the beauty of the River, to whom Rob had made in times past such valorous protestations of love. It was incomprehensible. Somber, dark "old Mary Stingaree" had bewitched him. But she and her father had outwitted Mary Stingaree, and she could win Rob back; anyway, she had him fast, she could afford to be forbearing and patient.

"See, Father," she exclaimed laughingly; "my old man is so stiddy already he weeshes to make up on the hill to work so we shall buy ourselves a home. I knew he was one good man, or I should not marry to him—no." Her teeth shone merrily, and the deep rose glowed in her cheeks.

Rob smiled faint appreciation, perforce—wintry sunshine on the pallid remorse of his features.

"Sure. He is one good stiddy man," said the Frenchman. "He shall have leetle—jest a *leetle*—for ze long

stip hill, eh?" And he produced the jug, which had been replenished through some dark and mysterious avenue of supply.

"Come, son," he began.

A frenzy of repugnance seized Rob. The familiar mode of address, the sight of the vehicle whose contents had wrought his ruin as the Frenchman held it out, his low, grimy features condescendingly leering, caused Rob to snatch the jug and hurl it through the open door, out over the ledges, crashing on the bare rocks of the river bed below.

"D—n the stuff!" he cried. "D—n the infernal stuff, forever and forever, amen. So help me God! Now I'm going to get out of here."

"You t'rowed heem too fur to smell heem, *son—son*," repeated Tee-bo hatefully, trembling with anger. But he did not attack Rob, whose fury he had learned to dread. The pupil had proven powerful as well as apt, and had the natural advantage of being twice the size of his antagonist.

Cuby clapped her hands. "He is gran', Father. See you how good he is. A girl lak' me knows how to be glad that her husban' is riform'. Me—I think it is good—good."

"Vair' good. He is riform'," muttered the Frenchman dryly, going out to harness his team for a day of log-hauling.

Cuby lifted her bright face for Rob to kiss. "Good-by," she said, but added no endearing epithet.

"Good-by, little girl," said Rob manfully.

Words pressed to Cuby's lips, but she did not utter them.

"I shall be awfully busy to-day, Cuby," said Rob. "I am to work some for Mrs. Byjo, too. But I shall come down to-morrow to see you, if I have the strength to drag down."

Cuby's brown eyes darkened—with loving tenderness, the soul-sick Rob feared. But she spoke lightly.

"All a-right, Rober'. You shall not come if you are tired. To come down the hill is easy, but to climb back that is hard; is it not so?"

"Yes, that's the hard part," said Rob grimly, utter woe in his eyes.

Out of sight, he drew a long breath, and lifting his hat, let the wind blow through his hair.

"If I'd kept my head, I was getting on all right with—Mary," he moaned, slowly. "She did not want me to love her, but I was getting clean in her eyes, and I might, in time—oh, God! But listen"—he ground his teeth at the fir trees—"for I swear it by the Almighty, living or dying, hope or no hope, I'll never touch that stuff again; not if they get on their knees to me; not if I die wanting it—and so I swear."

He clenched his fists and jaws with the reviving obstinacy of some ancestor whose own will had been his law, who having chosen some path, casting all vain desire aside, would die but would not yield his purpose.

He saw Bate, over in the field, though not at work. He was sitting on the fence, thoughtfully turning his regard from the crows near at hand to the flocks of sea gulls in the distance. The fact that he was not at work, and something in his general aspect, sent home to Rob the thought that it was Sunday. In the tumultu-

ous experiences of the past twelve hours he had forgotten. Cuby, who semi-occasionally dressed beyond all the rural brightness of the River girls, and sat fearlessly on one of the back seats of the Baptist church—Cuby had forgotten, too. As for Gar', he frequently sneaked off with his team when business was good to make a haul of wood on Sunday. The first thought that came to Rob was that he was glad he had forgotten, and had made his escape from the River.

Drearily, punctiliously, he took off his boots at the door. "I'll tell her myself," he groaned, and entered hat in hand, and with eyes that had lost the fire of mortal hope. But the news had already flown from the River to Power Lot that Rob had lain drunk all night at Gar' Tee-bo's and, in the midst of the orgy, had been married to Cuby.

The general exhilaration incident to so full a flow of liquid delight among the revelers at the River caused these reports to vary in particulars. That Rob had drunk freely and had married Cuby, none disputed. Captain Belcher, having been informed by the fastidious master of the cruiser which had anchored overnight alongshore, that he had made himself criminally liable by his adventure as a welder of wedlock bonds, took a fancy to credit the statement, and now disowned the deed as proudly and blusteringly as he had, in fact, committed it, referring the act to its proper perpetrator, the Justice of the Peace: *he*, jealous of his office, and knowing his own frailties, though somewhat wondering, consented that he was indeed the man.

Wherefore, for Captain Belcher had a stout influence, the Justice of the Peace version was at present

prevailing, and in most instances honestly believed, and it was this that had come to Mary's ears.

She was sitting in the room which had been her mother's. The bed had been removed and the place very neatly transformed into a sitting-room, and Mary, her morning work done, was there reading.

Rob knocked. Mary came to the door and opened it. She did not invite him to sit down; she awaited what he had to say.

"I guess you know?" he murmured. His look was the most desolate she had ever seen in all her life; his lips were shriveled and cracked.

"Yes, I know," she answered.

"They put that hellish drink before me," he went on: "the girl herself offered it——"

"Oh, don't go on," said Mary wearily; "there is no one to blame but yourself."

Rob gasped.

"We cannot fence you 'round with a special environment and with perfect conditions," she said. "The world is full of pitfalls and temptations; if you cannot avoid and resist them, what is the use? I do not see any help for it."

"So you think there is not any help for me, now?"

"What do *you* think? In such a case as this, Robert Hilton, I believe I would think for myself, and right strongly."

"I could buy her off, if I had the money—that is rightfully mine."

"I do not understand you."

"I said that I could buy Cuby off."

"I wish," said Mary—for she thought that Rob

was more deeply implicated than he actually was, and so she had no mercy—"I wish that Virginia would come in with her oxwhip." Tears of rage and disgust filled her eyes.

"Miss Stingaree, I have never wronged Cuby." Rob faced her with stern dignity and royal faith at last. "They got me drunk. I swear to you, I remember nothing of the marriage ceremony. I slept, drunk, all night on the floor."

"You had promised to marry her."

"I—I thought she took it in fun. I meant it in fun—that is, of course, not seriously. How could I marry, on nothing, off here?"

"Evidently she took it seriously; and—you promised her, and—you have married her. A promise and its fulfillment. I see no way but to make the best of it."

Rob looked away out of the window; his haggard face and quivering, parched lips were pitiful to see.

"Sit down," said Mary, as she returned to her seat by the table, resting her head on her arm; her own face was sorrowful.

Rob sat down, weakly, as though no health or strength remained in him.

"Well, I'm done for," he said. "It's all over, and I'm done for; and I've lost your respect now, forever."

"No, oh no," she answered quietly; "you have never yet—won it—very fully." She, whose tone was usually electric with meaning and decision, spoke now so compassionately, so fearful of wounding him, he cried from the very depths.

"You never *could* respect me, now."

"That means," she sighed, "you haven't the courage

to get up after a fall, to win out, to climb up, to gain your own self-respect first of all. I wondered if you would have the courage. I knew—you had—considerable courage; I wondered if you would have—such courage.”

Rob sat a while, silent, his head in his hands, and his ruminations seemed to bring him no exaltation.

“The road looks devilish steep,” he said at last, grinding his teeth, and looking up with only remorse and bitterness on his face.

Mary did not answer.

“I can’t live with *her*,” he continued angrily. “I don’t love her, really—and she doesn’t honestly and truly care for me. She—I’ve always seen it—she bridles and blushes with all her soul when Captain Jim Turbine comes in sight. But she thinks, she and her father, that I may have money some time. Cuby thinks I may be able to take her to gay cities and all that sort of thing, some time. Anyway, I can’t go down there, down to the River, to live—I can’t do it.”

“Do they ask it?”

“N-no; Gar’ said better live up here till I’d earned enough to buy a home. It’s a great inspiration, isn’t it, to work for—to work as I’ve got to work?”

He lifted his dry, haggard eyes, stolid with despair, to Mary.

It seemed to him that her manner toward him had never been so considerate, so almost confidential, as now—now that he had lost her. Her voice ran on at last, so kindly:

“The steepest hills are sometimes climbed, not through ‘inspiration,’ but only with pain, persistence

and pain. It doesn't make any difference, does it, so long as we get to the top? There might be a view up there that would almost make one forget the pain. I do not know—but it might be. I believe I would trust to it. I believe with all my soul it would prove true."

In such a tone, a mother, free of all passion save the heavenly, might speak to a crushed and bleeding child. It was tragic, to Rob; but, still, it was sweet; any tenderness from her was unutterably sweet. And if, like a child, he might have put his head down on her breast, just that once, just for one moment, and felt her hand on his forehead, he believed that he could go forward, marry Cuby, raise his family, hoe potatoes, to the last earthly sunset, and then knock with square shoulders for admittance at the gates of heaven as a faithful husbandman and householder.

That memory was not to be his. Her dark eyes pitied his weakness, but her tried heart turned from him with a weary sigh.

He went to his own room, sank on the bed, and slept with the heavy reaction of one, who, from a vista of majestic battles and bays of victory, suddenly turns to find that he has nothing to live for.

He did not hear the call to dinner.

"At it ag'in, up in his room, I s'pose," said Bate to Mary; "brought a bottle home with him, prob'ly."

Mary did not know; but her heart gave a bound of relief in spite of herself, when Rob came down in the early evening scrupulously dressed for "Sunday," penitent and resigned, his eyes slightly dazed at the new, hard future which faced him with the stupendous mushroom growth of a single night.

"Goin' down to take yer wife to meetin'?" Bate inquired, in a tone of unusual jocularity.

"Yes," said Rob, and it would have been hard to pick a fight with him.

In his heart of hearts he was going down to the Baptist meeting-house to hear Mary sing. It was the monthly Sunday evening "song service," and Mary affiliated herself with the River so far as to go down to sing with and for them on these occasions, just as in old times. "Special request" for solos poured in upon her at these times, and she complied, meekly, religiously. It was about the only time one ever saw her meek. When she shone, and her voice thrilled you and sent light into the souls of the spiritually dim of vision, then it was that she was meek; and it was worth going to see and hear.

Rob went in to the meeting in the face of the gaping villagers, with Cuby showily hanging on to his arm. Verily, Rob's high heart was safe broken.

"Say, what was your maiden name afore ye got married, Daisy?" he heard an envious youth taunt him from among the group which besieged the door. Rob's polished, clean-shaven face did not change, any more than as if he had not heard the insult; it did not touch him. Nothing mattered much. It mattered to Cuby. She sprang deftly aside and dealt that wicked one a ringing box on the ear with the palm of her pretty hand.

"Mind you your business," she admonished him, with finality. Cuby was immensely admired and respected among the River boys, and he of the aggressive speech melted on the instant into abashed retreat.

Mary sat with the "choir" on the rude platform, and sang with them, entirely patient of the nasal or strident voices which accompanied hers. Rob thought her voice, as compared with the others, like a white-winged boat sailing a clear, straight path through a choppy sea. He waited until the drastic office of the general hubbub should cease, and he should hear her voice alone.

"Miss Stingaree is 'specially requested,' to know ef she will sing 'Peace, be still,'" announced officially the salubrious tones of Captain Belcher.

Miss Stingaree sang, and the Galilean storm, perturbing in some way or other every poor human soul there present, fell ahushed and wondering at her voice:

"'Peace, be still: peace, be still.'"

Rob listened with downcast head. He could not look at her—he dared not, so full was his heart.

"Come een, Meester Heelton," said Gar', more respectfully at the door whither Rob had escorted Cuby: "come een, have leetle 'musement, eh? Sure, that ees tam good way;" and he winked suggestively of a recruited jug.

"No," said Rob, "I must be up yonder ready for my work in the morning." He turned suddenly to Cuby. "I will work for our home with all my might, little girl," he said.

Cuby nodded assent, but she was distinctly weary of Rob. His easy smiles, his ready laughter with its complement of glittering, white teeth, the accustomed swagger of his gait, all these amiable qualities seemed to have left him, as if some mysterious wand of Fate

had touched and changed him in an hour into the form of withering eld.

“You act *funnee*,” she adjured him. “You act lak’ you was walkin’ ’round in you’ sleep, lak’ you was in your baid asleep.” She tried the effect of her own merry laugh.

Rob smiled wanly ; but it seemed to him, as he climbed the hill, that her words were not inapt. To his own soul, he seemed to be walking in his sleep.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIGHT WITH BEASTS

THE slow Leevya Potter had sailed off at last with her cargo of wood. In the faithful processes of time she returned, like the proverbial bad penny, to her native shore—the signal for a gala night among the rum-loving of the River.

Both Cuby and her father counted upon this as a means of rallying Rob once more. The vain girl, ignorant and impetuous as she was innocent, instead of congratulating herself on his sustained habit of temperance and condoning his moods of sorrowful dignity, was alert with suspicion; and for very pride's sake, in the face of her small world, would rather have him fallen, and *her own*.

The "Hill" was all too plainly the haven where he would be. He worked doggedly and unfalteringly; his calls at the River grew fewer and more brief. Then, after the slow sidling in of the Leevya, Bate approached Rob in that ingratiating style which boded only ill to its victim.

"I was down to the River this mornin'," he said. "Cuby sent up word she wanted to see ye particular."

Rob went at once. On entering Gar' Tee-bo's door he fell at once upon the purpose of his summons, and a singular group seated in intense devotion around a table on which stood a profusion of bottles, some with

labels which he recognized as of distinction of quality and well approved in his revels of old. Bate, he observed with some surprise, had arrived before him, and was already seated at the table.

"Take a cheer," cried a convivial voice. "Come on, Bobby, an' have a little o' the hummin' bird. S-s-sh. Ain't this the purtiest mess o' booze ye ever see? A man can't allus be a parson. 'All work an' no play makes Jack——'"

Rob surveyed the scene and turned white, not with the struggle of self-denial, but with the very demon of anger. He turned on his heel, slammed the door behind him, and walked away.

Cuby called to him, Gar' shouted after him with an oath, but he tramped on sturdily, and the outline of his shoulders was forbidding. He had become physically a problem which the denizens of the River had no disposition to tackle, and his insolent, broad back was allowed to disappear into the dusk, unmolested.

"Heem no good. Heem tam fool," said Gar' maliciously.

"Ma'y Sting'ree has made of herself a witch to him, she has him bewitch'," averred Cuby, in a high passion of mortification and disappointment.

"Look here, Cuby," said Bate, once an acknowledged suitor for her hand who had been despised for the sake of the fair-haired Rob; "look here, Ma'y ain't no witch. The' *is* witches that I know of, but it ain't her."

He winked at her as he met her eye, with an assumption of the old-time license to render her her due of admiration.

Rob marched on up the hill; and he had now no bewildered sense of walking in his sleep. His spirit was afire, his soul was resolute. Once he paused in exultation and shook his fist in the direction of the low orgies at the River.

"You did not trap me, this time, no. You laid some honey for the bear—and the bear did not care a d—n for it, did he? You baited up your old hooks—and the fish swum past 'em without a nibble. You've met your man, now, you devils, and we'll have it out. You'll find what I'm made of. You'll find whether I've forgotten, or can ever forget, by God, the blood—the good blood—the high blood—that runs in my veins—you; why, my grandfather, my father, would have looked at *you* as all of a mess with the dirt under their feet."

Rob's nostrils quivered, his head towered high; he scarcely felt the tedium of the ascent as he turned again to climb. He stood on the summit, looking seaward. The moon had risen, and the holy splendor of the world beat in awesomely upon his consciousness.

"Say, it's wonderful, just *living*, up here," he breathed to himself; "it's—it's—interesting. Just living and looking 'round is interesting enough, up here, by Jove."

The night was by far too glorious to ignore, and the Stingaree house was dark; Mary, calling on some of the neighbors, probably. Rob, high of heart, feared nothing. The sense was upon him that he could march anywhere, even over the brink of a precipice, scathless.

"There must be a superb view over at 'Spook House' to-night," he murmured. "I'll go over there and take a peek at it."

Through ditch and brush and along the edge of ledges he made his way; for he was unfamiliar with the trail known to the natives, along which only once Cuby had directed his steps when, absorbed in her pretty merriment, he had gone with her to hear the "knock-in's" at Spook House.

There had dwelt at one time at Power Lot and the River, a purely English element, so far inspired by the religious and æsthetic sense as to rear a little church on the commanding pinnacle toward which Rob was now advancing. That little band of worshippers—expatriate in this strange land—had long since ceased to assemble at any earthly summons, though the bell in the old steeple called weirdly for them on certain nights when the wind was high. And there were some who said they *did* assemble, all in wedding-white, amid the aisles of the crazy old church now called "Spook House"—where no other congregation had gathered for many a long year. Only the lovelorn, for lack of any more cheerful or definite entertainment, were accustomed to wander thither through the sentimental shades of evening to listen to the "knockings" made by the supernatural visitors within.

Meanwhile, whatever single item of the wild and tragic had been lacking to the landscape of Power Lot was supplied by this old hulk of an edifice, standing tower-like, wind-beaten and desolate, on its forlorn height, a thrilling reminder of transcendental reverie to all the country round.

Rob had forgotten about the knockings. The night drew him, and the moonlight, and the awful isolation and grandeur of the site. It was farther than he had

imagined, but he walked on stoutly, coming up at the rear of the church and intending to make straightway for the front for the sublimity of the sea view.

But he heard the low murmur of voices, and before the traditions concerning Spook House could pierce his sense with any terror, he distinctly recognized Mary Stingaree's voice. Amaze and curiosity held him still. Standing on a bank of underbrush, he could look through the yawning windows to those that were also a paneless, yawning gulf on the other side. There, outside the church, leaning against the rotten windowsill, stood Mary and myself—Jim Turbine. Our faces were turned from him, our view was to the sea. A sudden mad jealousy seized Rob, to whom I had been an object quite outside the pale of any serious friendship with a woman like Mary Stingaree.

"Well," I said to Mary, unaware of my smouldering audience at the rear of the church, "if you wish, I'll go down to the River and see what I can do to get Rob and Bate away from Tee-bo's."

"They both went down there," she answered. "Virginia told me. She gets all the gossip, voluntarily rendered through Mrs. Treet."

"At the house I hardly felt inclined to bother with 'em," I said; "but when you look off here, things that did not seem of so much consequence get up and sing inside a man as though they demanded to be heard before other things. That is all the way I can put it. I reckon you understand."

"My 'brother' Jim! I knew that you would go. Did I take an unfair advantage," she added, half smiling, "in bringing you here, on the way, to look off

over sea and land? Shall you go down the footpath of the ledges, Jim? I'll go back home alone, and I shall think of you—with more gratitude—than I can ever speak—every step of the way.”

She was eager to have me gone. I never yet had stumbled by luck on any romantic situation with Mary but that the summons came to me from some quarter or other to go off straightway and risk my neck somewhere for the sake of other folks. Still, I made easy of the fatality, being dire used to it. I loitered only a few moments.

“You can easily manage to get Robert away, I think,” she continued rapidly; “you can easily persuade him! but Bate, in spite of his degradation, is a *man* in determination, you know.”

“Rob threw Tee-bo's jug of rum off into the river-bed; so I've heard.”

“Yes, but he was in a pet. There's no ‘hold-fast’ to him. In another mood, a little hardship or disappointment, and he would drink again like a fish.”

She sighed and turned her face northward where the evening star shone. Rob saw the beautiful profile. I looked, too, wistfully.

“Mary,” I said, “I've offered myself to you many times, I know; and I am not worthy of you. I do not blame you. But if you could ever look to me a bit, I'd give my life to make you happy.”

“You honor me, I know that,” she replied graciously, and with an intensity meant to compensate me for the loss of all, “but—forgive me—*that* can never be.”

She rested her hand on my arm, and I upheld her. But I reckoned, though she saw far, there were some

steep places in the world that poor Rob and I, even, might have a better knowledge of than she.

"Is there anyone else, Mary?" I said. "I am such an old friend, you might tell me if there is anyone else?" She seemed to regard the question as too meaningless to require an answer; her look seaward was not that of a girl remembering a lover; it was only thoughtful, as though her soul went gravely off that way.

"I believe poor 'Daisy' loves you with all his heart," I said.

She came back from her abstraction, and laughed.

"He is a charming boy, when he is himself, but he is not a *man* at all, Jim. What ever put such a thought into your head? Rob! why, he does not seem to me to be a man at all."

Someone slunk away in the shadows. I went my way down the ledges, and Mary went her way along the trail, home. Neither of us saw Rob. Like a stag, vitally shot, proud to die alone, he turned aside where no one would overtake him and sat down weakly upon a stone behind a clump of bushes.

Moments elapsed before he lifted his head again to the solemn, sentient scene spread wide before him. For his making or his marring, he was alone in the universe, now. Every prop had fallen away from him. The last friend of all—and the dearest he had ever known—had scorned him. He saw again her sweet profile, he heard her slighting words.

"He—he is not a man at all."

And earth and air repeated the words about him, not jeeringly, but with an immeasurable sorrow. Rob fell so low that he fell back on elemental reason. Why had

Mary seemed so far from him? and the hope of winning her always as suspensive and vague as yonder infinitely distant star? He could not "hold fast," he was vain of purpose, weak of will—he was "not a man at all."

The latchkey years came back to him, the nights of carousal, the sodden days, his paralyzing illness, the suicidal, driveling idiocy of it all. And even when health had been restored through sheer force of circumstances and necessity, his riotous will, at the first sight of the tempter, had plunged him unhesitating into the well of his former dissipations. He had made idle love to a girl whom now he longed to cast from him; he had gone whining to Mary Stingaree with his selfish regrets. He was "not a man at all."

Rob fell so very low that even resentment, which once would have swept in upon him as a flood, had now no place in his soul. All his newly acquired vigor had oozed from his blood, all courage from his heart. He dreaded to rise. How long he sat there he neither knew nor cared. It was a long vigil. Mary went sadly to her room, leaving the house door open for the return of the wanderers. I went down to the River and found Bate at the evil brew, but not Rob.

Rob sat crushed and hopeless, alone on the mountain-side; unbearably alone when, at last, he staggered to his feet. It was too much. The soul cannot live alone, and Rob, of sheer necessity, cried out.

"O God," moaned the poor lad, "are *You* anywhere?"

He had a simple fancy that only the old Bible, bending itself to those dilemmas of the soul commonly known as "religion," besides being the traditional refuge of

the sick at heart, could tell him that. He crept up to his room noiselessly, and with one hand weakly supporting himself by the table, he opened the ancient volume. "If, after the manner of men"—there it was, again—*his* text, evidently; God threw it at him, persistently. "If, after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus."

Beasts? Beasts of intemperance, perhaps; of reckless riotousness, of selfish passion, of weak, purposeless will? And fighting them for what?

Ah, nothing left now for him in all the world of delight and beauty, but just, as a poor skeleton in moral rags, to try to stand up and "be a man."

Not one bit gloriously, but after the manner of the abject, goaded to his feet in the ring. Not with love and honor and acclaim; but quite forsaken, a beaten soul naked to the scorn of all, even so, unfalteringly now to the death, to stand up and "fight with beasts at Ephesus."

Rob clenched his fists once more, and lifted to heaven the rekindling fire in his woe-begone eyes. There was still a *fight* left.

CHAPTER XIII

FRIENDLY

THE depths of life are not with the suicide, nor with the man whose hair turns gray in a single night; these treat existence with comparatively absurd lightness. The depths are with him who, through the lowness of his fall and the humility of his soul, has caught a sense of the ocean of eternity about him; who has lost his importance to himself, and walks, well entertained and listening, childlike, along the shore.

Though the rollicking nature reasserted itself in Rob, it was purely; there were newly channeled depths, over which the sprite sat sunning himself, but the depths were there.

"Say, Hilton's wriggled clear o' Ma'y's apern-strings," said Bate to Cuby. "He's perlite to her, but he's clean got over his mash."

"Me—I think he is crack' in his haid," admitted Cuby.

"It's a pity you ever got spliced onto him. You might 'a' done better," Bate reminded her modestly.

"He is one good stiddy man," rejoined Cuby guardedly. "Scol' an' scol', an' make a sport of him, you can no more make him to be in anger. He only smile, lak you was dirt. He is stiddy, savin' his money, all, to rent the Treet place for me and him to make a home. But he is not as I lak; he is not to me, any more, amusin', frien'ly; he makes himself in loaf with

all droll folks, an' the more they be lak people make a laugh at them, the more he loafes them. He is become crack' in his haid."

"He's been a fool ever sence *I* first seen him," said Bate. "Well, you're tied to him, so there's no use talkin'."

"If he goes clean crezzy," said Cuby, "I shall to get quit of him."

"If you do that, I'll marry ye myself, the way ye ought ter be married, Cuby. Ye done a durn foolish thing."

"He was not so when I firs' seen him. How is anybody goin' to tell?"

"You could 'a' depended on me to be the same thing right along."

"Yes, that is true," said Cuby, with placid and entirely concealed cynicism.

They both sighed, Cuby in a delightfully equivocal fashion, Bate with an active sentiment of revenge.

Meanwhile, except with Bate and his ilk, Rob was winning a reputation for engaging sanity of spirit and sterling rudimentary good sense in his faithfulness to duty.

Old man Trawles, who once had given him a wide berth, stopped familiarly by the fence where Rob was hoeing.

"Good-morning, sir," remarked the devoted young husbandman, blithely elevating his hat; for Jacob Trawles was a very old man.

"Mornin'," responded Jacob listlessly, and fixed upon Rob his brown, melancholy, rather vacant eyes; "you've seen better days, and so have I."

"Yes," said Rob, freely giving to the old man the serious approbation which his speech called for; "I've heard how you used to make money back in the States."

"Did Car'line tell you?"

"Others than she have told me," replied Rob.

Jacob Trawles looked sentimentally pleased; he very rarely smiled. "I am not penniless yet, by any means," he averred. He took off his ancient tall silk hat and stroked it with a seedy black broadcloth sleeve. He was the only one in Power Lot who wore a tall silk hat.

"'Penniless!' I should say not," responded Rob.

"But I'm wifeless," said old man Trawles, again fixing Rob with his steady gaze.

"How long has Mrs. Trawles been dead?"

"I have had *two*," answered Jacob, his look unswerving.

"Three times for luck," blurted out Rob to get a little relief from the delicacy of the situation. "Why don't you try again?"

Jacob held out his hand. Rob kept on hoeing, but there was no ignoring it; the hand remained outstretched, so Rob stepped up and took it.

"I want to," said Jacob. "I want to get married again. You and I are in the same boat. You want to rent Car'line Treet's place, and I want her *to* let it and come over to my house as my *third*."

Rob made a faint effort at withdrawing his hand, but Jacob only clasped it tighter.

"You've done poorly in marrying, Robert—poorly. You've married into the lowest nest anywheres around. My heart aches for you, Robert."

"Oh, the devil," said Rob. "Cuby's unfortunate in her surroundings, but she is a good girl, and I suppose she is my wife. We'll say no ill of her, sir, if you please."

"Fire! Fire!" murmured the sentimental Trawles; "you are full of fire. I am naturally fiery myself, but Gid and Nell pester me so, I am losing all my will-power. They are set against my having a third."

Rob made another cautious attempt to take away his hand, but Jacob Trawles gripped it firmly.

"Have you ever witnessed the efforts which my grandchildren, Gid and Nell, make to detain and obstruct me, when I start out with the intention of making a neighborly call on Car'line Treet?"

"Yes," said Rob, with extreme sheepishness, and a lurking grin which blushed itself out in good-nature, "I've seen them go after you and lead you back home."

"And in the Winter, they go off to the distant States, and leave me alone—alone."

Rob, after a last effort to free himself, patiently yielded up his right hand until such time as Jacob Trawles should see fit to release it.

"Alone," repeated Jacob, his melancholy eyes, unwinking, on Rob's face.

"Where are Nell and Gid, now?"

"Wild-strawberrying, Robert, wild-strawberrying, over beyond Joggins."

"It seems to me you have a chance now, if you wish to make a call."

"Yes, Robert, yes, I have it in mind; but we won't be premature, we will wait until they are well under the

brow of the hill. Yes, they are a mongrel lot, I fear, them Tee-bos. The Stingarees have good blood; in fact, remarkable. Bate and his father were dissipated, but nevertheless Mary inherits good blood—grand. Virginia Stafford inherits good blood, tho' they call her 'Byjo,'—grand blood, Robert."

"You wouldn't want Mrs. Byjo for your third, though, would you?" Rob inquired, lending himself to curiosity, since his fate was to be so hopelessly pinioned by the mild, firm hand of old man Trawles.

"No. Too much fire—too much fire. At my age I want someone I can control. Car'line is easy guided."

"She comes of good blood, doesn't she?"

"Only just fair-to-middlin', Robert," sighed Jacob. "But she is fifty, and I don't choose her for pedigree. I choose her for easy guidance of her, and to slicken up my house."

Jacob released Rob's hand, and walked with slow dignity in the direction of Widow Treet's house.

The Widow Treet herself had seen him passing, from the window, where she was calling on Mrs. Byjo; and with a lady-like tranquillity of gait she now issued forth, and, in composed view of his retreating form, stopped to talk with Rob.

"Torment his old pelt," said she gracefully, "I believe he's goin' over to set with me a spell. Ye see, Nell and Gid's gone strawberryin'; and now I ask you ef old man Trawles ain't takin' the chance to sweel out on his own picnic?"

Rob admired Mrs. Treet; so often he had seen her washing dishes or scrubbing floors for charity's sake in *anybody's* house which trouble or need had visited.

And aside from that, nature had endowed her with girlish, refined features and hair as glossy as it had been when she was twenty. She wore a boy's cap—a souvenir from an advertising agent, with "Try Old Honesty Soda" largely emblazoned on its visor; and in other respects she maintained a jauntiness of bearing and expression unaffected by the sobriety of middle age, and her tongue was of that tender insidiousness which woos the listening soul.

"He is going over to sit with you a spell—if you're at home," said Rob, with twinkling eyes.

Mrs. Treet winked back with well-preserved blue eyes of her own.

"I guess he'll keep till I git there," she drawled.

Rob laughed explosively. The exhilaration of the air frequently beset him to untimely mirth.

"Mr. Trawles seems to be a very learned man," he added gravely, besieging a clump of weeds with his hoe.

"Ya-as, oh, ya-as," with conscious pride went on the sweetly meandering tongue of Caroline Treet. "Ya-as, he's got learnin', an' a vary kind heart, poor old man Trawles has. He never fishes a newspaper out o' any old ruck down to the wharf but what he hikes over to me, soon as ever he gits a chanct, and lays his binockalers athwart his old nose an' reels it off to me tell I go plumb asleep in my chair. Oh, ya-as, sometimes when I'm gappin' like a chicken with the pip jest afore I close my eyes an' go off, I feel what a mercy readin' is to them that has allus escaped it. An' as for writin', I know I haves my times o' bein' lazy—we all have; but I can say truly, I never yet set an' pampered a lazy

dispersition long enough to l'arn to write. Whatever faults they lay to my door, nobody 's ever flung *that* at me, an' so I tell you frankly."

Mrs. Treet disposed herself very comfortably on a broken rail, and taking off her soda-advertisement cap she leisurely fanned her fine and serious features therewith.

"Mr. Trawles is a fine-looking old man," said Rob.

"Ya-as, oh, ya-as. He got slickened up, times past, when he lived to the States, and it 'ud break his old heart t' have any o' the spruce rubbed off 'n him, the durned old dude," she added affectionately; and continued:

"But I wish he'd lay off his tormented old plug hat along from the middle o' June to the fifteenth o' August, and I've told him so. Even sech as preach the gospil, I've told him, don't go sweatin' around in a stove-pipe hat in dog days; 'then why should you?' says I, 'that never sticks your nose inside a meetin' house, ef you can help it.' I don't suppose there's another livin' soul could 'a' brought up that old plug hat to him an' thrun it in his face the way I have."

"No; he will take anything from you."

"Ya-as," said Mrs. Treet, suddenly retiring to a non-committal tone; "I've allus made it a rule to be frien'ly with all the neighbors. Some has their tiffs and their *mads*, an' keep it up. But take a widow woman like I be, left all alone, an' two boys, mates o' vessels, an' the youngest blacksmithin' in the States, an' one girl with a milliner to Boston, an' one married down to Kasha Valley; an' when you think o' fire or be-
ing took sudden in the night, you make away with your

tiffs an' your mads, however much you might like to show 'em out, an' go around to all your neighbors alike, mean or decent, all an' every, without throwin' it up to their faces, skippin' none."

Fire or sudden death both seemed so foreign to the probable fate of Caroline Treet, Rob questioned within himself the tragic nature of her motives, suspecting that an innocent love of gossip might play a large part in the cheerful atmosphere of amity which she sustained with her neighbors.

But he liked her. He liked to have her sit on the broken rail and talk to him.

"Do you think," he said straightforwardly, "that there will be any chance of my renting your place next winter, Mrs. Treet?"

Mrs. Treet allowed herself to become absorbed in the view about her, perfect placidity resting upon her features. She was so versatile that even a flowery appreciation of nature was but one item in the rounded sphere of her accomplishments.

"Lookin' out beyant, there, to the Gut is a interestin' thing to them that has artistry in their feelin's," she observed choicely. "Ya-as, oh, ya-as, I go down an' walk along shore sometimes for nothin' on this sinful 'arth save an' exceptin' jest only to look at the aspects. Often, as them can tell who's seen me at it, I've set over there in my winder tell nine o'clock at night, watchin' out on the scene. Many's the night I've set in perticaler, studyin' on the lights beginnin' their night's job over on Digby shore; oh, my, ya-as, an' the tears has come to my eyes as I watched them little fleets o' vessels peltin' in, an' scen the water all as ef she was bedaubed

with somebody's spillin' their paint pots onto her when the sun hove out er sight."

"I've often noticed you looking about as though you loved nature," Rob assured her, with a more than genial smile.

"Oh my, ya-as; and sometimes I don't exac'ly know whether I'd *ought* to go an' bury myself along o' an old man. I'm young myself, an' has young ambitions; and an old man, potterin' an' hawkin' around the house, though his house is better'n mine, I 'dmit, an' a safe chimbley an' no gap in the shingles, is a trial. Then, ag'in, I thinks how I've had my drill with one man, an' raised my fam'ly; an', though some would say I should be elevatin' myself, old man Trawles bein' so 'ristocratic, yet, when you consider of it in all lights sech a subject is fit to be considered in, you come to just this, an' nothin' more, 'Him who sets low, sets easy,' as the sayin' is."

"Yes," said Rob, "that is true. Him who sets low, sets easy." He repeated the woman's phrase unconsciously as though it were the pink of language and approvedly his own conviction.

"I'm a-makin' you a hat," said Caroline Treet, and still looked tranquilly off to the aspects, and did not blush.

"Making me a *hat!*" exclaimed Rob, leaning, arrested, on his hoe handle, his marveling soul in his eyes.

Caroline dealt out the good news sparsely, in a way to tease rather than appease the awakened appetite.

"Ya-as, it's a-goin' to be a dressy one, it's goin' to be the effects an' similarity of a stove-pipe, an' have all the genteeiness of it without no cumbersomeness."

"What is it made of?"

"Straw. The recipy has been kept clost in our fam'ly ever sence it first come down. Ya-as, it's made out o' the spick-an'-span o' clean artil'ry straw."

"You astonish me," gasped Rob.

"You ain't the first," admitted Caroline, visibly revolving on her tongue the delights of superior emprise, "that's been knocked all of a heap by it. The first one I ever made, I took an' bestowed it on the minister—which we had more settled in them days than we hav now, meetin'-goin' in them days not bein' hit or miss an' choose your own pleasure, but go you must; an' with religion the same, you wan't asked whether you'd have it, but the dose was giv' to you, an' down it went, an' no questions raised as to likin' it or not likin' it."

"So you gave one to the minister?" Rob suggested, hanging eagerly upon what might be still to come.

"Ya-as, oh my, ya-as, the first I ever wove. I hadn't quite got my bearin's, though, and the brim was wider an' the crown run up more to a p'int than what the style is, or ever was; but ef I do say it, an' I sh'd say the same ef I was to be called to-night, the' was mighty few tag-ends to it, for a beginner; an' I'd set myself so clost to the stent, bein' a sperrited girl, besides, I was pretty near wore out with it, an' nothin' but a frazzle myself when I handed it out to him."

"What did he say?" inquired Rob simply, his hoe lying forgotten at his side.

"He'd never had many gifts, Power Lot, God Help Us, bein' a place where the means was not always equal to the dispersitions, an' when I held that hat out to him,

he looked as though he couldn't believe a word of it. He swallowed an' gapped, an' gapped an' swallowed, an' to the livin' day o' my death I'll never forgit what he said."

"What did he say?" Rob made out to ask, in holy attention.

"He stammered an' he stuttered. Ef ever I seen a man overcome, I seen one that day. 'How much—how much do I owe you?' he says. 'It's all paid for,' says I, as namby-pamby as a squab on a nest o' moultin' eggs. 'How—how paid for?' says he. Then what did I do, 'stead o' settin' my cap for him, the way some was doin', who, ef the world is to be believed, their looks was no *better* 'n mine, but I ransacked around in the little pea-hen of a brain girls has bestowed on 'em at that age, an' anchored up by some drippin's o' religion I'd heard to meet'n', an' says I, as softy as a mess o' squish in the middle o' a lily pond, "*Free Grace*" has paid for it,' says I. Did you ever?" added Caroline; "maybe that don't make you sick, but it does me."

Rob stood shaking as with ague, tears of exquisite joy rolling down his cheeks.

"I don't wonder ye've got a fit," observed Caroline, rapidly fanning her own nauseated features with the emblematic cap on which "Try Old Honesty Soda" made a startling appeal to the needs of the situation. "Some says they sees their lost youth beckonin' of 'em back. Considerin' the pea-hen brains of them years, ef mine beckoned to me I shouldn't go, that's all." She spoke with the simple quietness of resolution, and continued, in gentle strain:

"I'm a-knittin' you some socks, too. I've seen your

wash out on the line, and tho' I don't say it to shame ye, yet the truth remains the same, that some things is past mendin'. Boughten hose is nothin' but a man cheat, anyway. I've wrought up somethin' that 'll stand by ye, as my man could testify ef he was here instead of havin' lain his earthly garments by. The yarn is 'Old Reliable Ironsides' brand, same I've been a-knittin' on these twenty years, fetched over from Waldeck through Jim, an' bought of old Jo Playmus without no break or disagreement between us all these years that be."

"I do not wonder that you have friends," said Rob, and though his face was red and his voice trembled, yet the feeling with which he spoke was very real.

"Ya-as, oh, ya-as," continued Caroline, like a lady, to cover his embarrassment. "Many's the time when Jo Playmus has been over here fishin' an' slung feet along o' me an' my man, under the table. Ef there was an apple, or any other pie stuff to be raised, green or winter-proof, accordin' to the season, I made 'em a pie. Once he giv' me the caution at eleven o'clock him and Jo 'ud be in to dinner at twelve. Don't say a word. I couldn't 'a' ketched my own feet, the way I fired 'em 'round. I rigged up that pie and had him in the oven by eight minutes past 'leven, and by forty after I had her out."

Rob questioned with a puzzled interested face of inquiry, and no guile.

"What made the pie a male when it went into the oven, and a female when it came out?"

"I don't know," replied Caroline Treet, with an equally guileless manner of resignation. "God A'mighty fashioned the langwidge o' men, an' I've allus had to

take it as I found it. But I'm thankful to say the's so many words in the dictionary layin' around loose, you can pick an' choose without no fear o' gittin' in over your head. Some has hard work to find words, I know; but as my father used to say, 'Langwidge allus comes easy to Car'line; it 'ud be better for her ef she was put to more pains to ackire it.' But what's the use in talkin'? We can't deny our gif's no more than we can our failin's."

Rob assented with a look of unblemished sympathy; and the broaching of an entirely new theme was excused by the thorough loyalty of the emotion which shone in his face.

"I should like to rent your house, by and by," he said, "for one thing, because I admire *you* so much; and it might be a mutual accommodation, if Mr. Trawles is so fortunate as to win you?"

"Oh, my, ya-as, my man was a good man," murmured the ever adroit and seaworthy Caroline, "a good kind man he was. I never see the tide makin' in through the Gut but I think o' the shortness o' life; an' be we ready? Be I? Be you? as the hymn says; and I allus try to go to meet'n down to the River ef the' is any. I'm sorry I didn't git some kind o' a sensible holt onto religion when I was younger; an' then ag'in I think, present time is the best time, after all, an' I'm cert'nly more able to meet up with an' examine doctrines now than when I didn't know no more 'n a weaklin' goose moltin' out her pinfeathers."

"Captain Treet was lost at sea, I've heard?" said Rob, and with the words as he faced Caroline, he lifted his hat from his damp curls.

"He was an able seaman," she made proud rejoinder, "and a great hand to cruise. Oh my, ya-as, he cruised as fur as the fardest, an' his talk was interestin'. Take what he'd met up with, an' his natterally seaman on-christian ways o' tellin' it, I could set by the hour, with my feet hove into the oven door on a cold day, to hear his gab. Ef he was here now, you wouldn't like nothin' better 'n to hear him reel it off. Ya-as, he's gone, the way we all must go, hauled up to our last final restin' place."

Rob thought of Mrs. Stingaree and her getting up and going forth, and his incipient notions of immortality found vent to the intended comfort of Caroline Treet's soul. "I don't believe they go *there*," he said. "I believe, when they get quit of it all here they go somewhere else. That's what I believe."

"What you drempt that time poor Mis' Stingaree died seems to have made dreadful fast on to you," answered Mrs. Treet, with an intimation in her own tone that the thought of continued existence was a normal and plausible one. "So fur as that is concerned, Robert, your beliefs an' my beliefs is jest as firm-mated as Virginny Stafford's oxen, an' goes calmly on their way. I lost two children when they was babies. They was jest a-gittin' into the habit o' smilin'; an' I don't mind sayin' that my thoughts o' them is *livin'* thoughts. Ef I git low by day and imagines of 'em dead, the good God sends 'em down at night, smilin' and dimplin' and beckonin' of me, as plain to say as ef the words was spoke, 'All is well, all is well; never be afeard to come. We couldn't smile at you like we're a-smilin' ef all wasn't well.'"

Caroline Treet drew a work-worn, muscular hand across the misty violet of her eyes, thrust her cap on to her head, and rose.

"Ef thar ain't that old dromodile," she said indulgently, indicating Jacob Trawles, who had started on a dissatisfied return from his quest at her door. "Wal', I got to make out thar' an' head him off. He's a kind old creatur', old man Trawles is; and I allus keep peace with my neighbors. I shouldn't wonder, when Nell an' Gid cruises off this Fall ef he'd be glad to git settled in his own ways with his flour and pork barrel stowed in and the hams in the downstairs closet before the line-storm."

Jacob Trawles beamed happily as he saw Mrs. Treet approaching. Rob watched them with an honest smile in his kind blue eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. BYJO'S BOARDER

ONE day as Rob leaned on his hoe handle the thought of being bound came to him all the fiercer for the wild freedom of the landscape. A hearty criminal in prison could interest himself in making his escape; but to stay, all unlaureled and uncheered, for the tedious self-imposed task of "fighting beasts" and proving himself a man; in this business, a youth, with whom the sun of joy is strong and the wind of adventure sweet, sometimes loses heart. While Rob's tireless muscles were developing the texture of whipcord, his brown cheeks were growing hollow.

In his bleak humility and loneliness, any kindly word from a fellow-mortal, any confidence or appeal from a human heart, came to him like wine and food.

"Rob, Rob Hilton! Come you over here, please. I want ye," called the Widow Byjo, swinging her own hoe aloft in beckoning and mandatory fashion. Now Rob, of his soul's volition, esteemed the Widow Byjo only next to Mrs. Treet, and he hastened over.

"Look here, I'm put out. Can you work in my patch here the rest of the day, Rob? I'm in for a tejus job, by Jo! Mary Stingaree has got a letter that Jim Turbine brought over to her, and I've got to take a city tourist to board. I'd rather have the devil, by Jo!

I could put *him* to some mush, in the kitchen. Jim's going to bring him over this afternoon."

"By gracious! I've never seen the devil," said Rob showing his white teeth broadly, "and I'm glad of the invitation to be right here on the premises. You can count on me."

Mrs. Byjo, deftly, with the tip of her hoe handle, gave his hat a prey to the winds. Having recovered it, Rob acknowledged the choiceness of these social amenities with a gay laugh.

"Wit is all right in its place," she advised him seriously, "but I'm in no position to have it played off on me to-day. What I need is help."

"I didn't think he'd come for you so soon," said Rob. "Don't you fret. You're good for fifty years more, and you'll be strong enough to knock him out even then."

A smile struggled through the gravity of Captain Byjo's features. When she gave a smile it was without reservation.

"Don't you get to thinking you're growin' such a smart stock of brains," she advised him, "for your face don't bear you out in it." Then she sighed, and her burden returned to her. "You know him, so they say; knew him in New York. He's a big gun, so they say, big in his line; and his name is Doctor Margate."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say, and I'm stumped, by Jo! I can till the fields, self-respecting, but I've never been brought down to boardin' tourists. But there! Mary, she asked it, and it's got to be. I'd do more than that for her. So I've got to swallow my spleen and go to work inside

sweepin' and bakin'. So there, as I'm a woman what *is* a woman, I've heaved my last sigh over it."

"Do you mean that Doctor Margate is coming up here?"

"I do. You don't appear to like him," said Mrs. Byjo, commenting on Rob's trembling lips and pale manner of excitement.

"Why, I've written him—in the past—four times, and he never answered me; written him urgently on most important matters, and he never answered me. I didn't know but he was dead."

"He may be dead to you and me, but he ain't dead to Mary Stingaree, I reckon," said Mrs. Byjo with meaning. "Not that Mary's confided any courting about it; but she says he's wore out with a tremenjus practice an' wants a sniff o' air among us Injuns in No-man's Land. But he's a widow like the rest of us, and his daughter was Mary's mate, and puttin' two and two together, I infer that Mary is some acquainted with him; it may be courting, it may not be; that ain't my business, but there's a lot that *is*; will you take my place in the fields? I'll pay ye thirty cents an hour."

"Why, yes, I'll go right to work," said Rob, with exceeding quietness—"right to work."

There was always that—work, to pay his board; work, to put by something for the rent of a home; work for this, work for that; whatever his perplexity or sorrow there was always work to be done—work, work, work.

When Rob went home to dinner he regarded Mary without any special curiosity. He had ceased to blush in her presence; his eyes, of late, had met hers very

frankly; but what, to the people round about, were laughing eyes, to her were dreary; they were ever grave and stricken when they met hers. She wondered, and sought to win him once more to a friendly confidence.

"Doctor Margate is coming to Power Lot to stay a while at Mrs. Stafford's, Robert. Perhaps she told you?"

"Yes. Is he coming to see you, or to find out about me? What is his object in coming 'way off here?"

Mary herself colored a little under the steady frankness of those dreary eyes; she noticed with a twinge of pathos the hollowness of his tanned cheeks.

"There is his letter," she replied, handing it out. "He gives simply as his motive the desire for a change of scene and air. I think his visit concerns you. I have written him, always, very kindly"—her eyes went down; Rob was now so strong and virile a creature in appearance for this indulgent sort of treatment—"very encouragingly, about you."

"Thank you," said Rob drily, rising. "I trust you did not have to strain a point in order to be kind."

She looked after him with a new emotion of surprise. He walked carefully across the clean floor in his slippered feet, sat down on the doorstep and put on his boots as usual, and tramped methodically over to Mrs. Byjo's to his labors.

It fell to my share, as "Jim," of course, to fetch Doctor Margate over from Waldeck station in my boat. He was not so old a man as I had thought; he did not seem old, and since he was going up to see Mary, I should have hated him for being so straight and grand, if there hadn't been a look in his eyes like a tired dog

sent out, after a shipwreck, to bring another body in. I had a dog like that once, and here were his old, staunch, dying eyes looking at me again out of this man's head. I didn't trust him, though; people may prove very different, said I to myself, from what their headlights indicate. He had a flower in his buttonhole when I first saw him on the station platform, and I knew what that meant; he was after Mary, whether she knew it or not; and the conviction struck me hard as we sailed over that what he wanted he would get.

He understood all about a boat; he knew everything; he had the gift o' gab so that even the gulls followed him to listen. I'd heard he was worn out, but only for his dog-eyes he looked as strong as Samson, with his ruddy cheeks and iron-gray hair, and his hands were almost as sinewy as mine.

I had a buggy team engaged to bring him up the hill, and he never shrunk, as most people do, from driving up that hill for the first time, for fear things 'll start backwards. No, he kept looking back and expatiating on the view, and asked me to stop a minute once in the most breakneck place of all, where I had to turn the old horse sidewise to give her any footing at all, and he looked off, saying, "Superb! Glorious!"

I got so sick of it, I slewed the old horse back a little with a sly taut on the reins, to try to scare my slick passenger and shut off his "glorious" wind, but he only said coolly:

"Always slack on the lines when a horse is climbing, my friend," says he, and I felt several kinds of an unnecessary fool.

We came up on to the plains and steered up the lane.

In a field over to the right was Rob Hilton working away in his old faded shirtsleeves and beclodded boots.

"Why—why, that looks like Robert Hilton," said the doctor; "yes, that must be Rob off there. What—what has he on his head?"

"One of the hats Caroline Treet makes."

"She must be a very gifted person."

"She is all of that."

"Is it necessary for him to wear it?"

"Well, I suppose she heard there was company coming, and hurried up to get it done, and brought it over to him; and he put it on so as not to hurt her feelings. He's capable o' doin' just such things as that, Rob is," I said bitterly. For the old boy sitting beside me was so slick. If a man has had advantages—all prodded with the world's information and greased with culture till it fairly shows—he doesn't want to shake 'em around too careless before folks that haven't had 'em. Rob was different. He'd had advantages, but he could cover 'em all up in a minute so as to be one with you till you'd never know but what he had been born, bred, and raised in Power Lot, God Help Us.

"Is he like that? I thought it might prove so. Good!" The doctor's tired eyes lightened in a way I did not understand. "I am glad if he can be like that," he repeated.

I sort of gnashed my teeth internally.

"The sun's pretty hot to swelter around under to-day," I said. "Sitting here and taking the breeze ain't like standing up to bone-labor."

"He has changed," said the doctor, not minding me;

"even from here one can see that he has grown as strong as an ox."

"He works like one," I said; "he's the steadiest drudge anywheres around."

That triumphant light kept waking in his eyes; and as for me, I could have tumbled him out of the buggy with a good will.

"That is Miss Stingaree's house, I suppose, near where Rob Hilton is working?" he said.

"No," said I; "that's Captain Byjo's—Mrs. Stafford's, I mean. Rob is her hired man just now; he's working out—twenty cents an hour;"—I had not yet heard of the recent raise in his wages—"toil and sweat is his portion. The Stingaree house is over there on the other side o' the lane."

Mary came to the door as we drove up, and it went to my heart like cold ashes, the job of bringing that fine old fellow there, to confab and talk high-flown language along o' her. My sympathies just fairly gushed out all of a sudden, toward poor Rob Hilton, beating away at his work in the potato field. "He used to be teasing me to sail him over to Waldeck," thought I to myself. "Well, he shall go to Waldeck, and have a good time too, and I'll keep company with him as merry as he likes—consistent with keeping out of the rum-fiend's clutches."

I got rid of Doctor Margate as brusquely as I could at Mary's door, and acknowledged her smile of greeting with a short nod. Then I went over to Captain Byjo's and deposited the great man's heavy valise, like any truckman; and coming out, I stopped in the field where Rob was.

He lifted up his head, and bit his lip; and—yes—there were the cruellest kind of tears in his strained eyes—the unshed kind; he could not seem to speak; his mouth quivered.

“Hello, old man,” said I, and I could not help putting an arm along his shoulder. I’d never been familiar with him, but I felt familiar with him, then and forever. “Bear up,” says I, “you and I got to bear up, an’ steer right on. I know the tune, same as you,” says I, “but the seas ain’t goin’ to swaller us; we’ll beat the seas. D—n it all, we got to steer right on,” says I. “I’m goin’ to, an’ you’re as much of a man as I am, any day.”

“You don’t think that,” says he; and being all of a sudden familiar with him forever and forever, I read his soul.

“I do mean it,” says I. “Don’t you give *me* the lie! If ever a man was made able to steer right on, it’s you, Rob Hilton. If you don’t know it yet, *I* know it, by all that’s holy! Come, let’s shake.”

“All right,” says he; and it may be a big word, considerin’ the occasion, but I felt immortal strength along o’ the heart-break in the grip o’ the poor boy’s hand.

“Now look here,” says I; “say, when your first patch o’ potatoes is ready to dig, what do you say to a sail with me over to Waldeck? I know somebody there that’ll give you a fancy price for ’em. We’ll load ’em on to the boat, and if you will help me a little with some other truck I’ve promised to take over, the business shan’t cost you a penny, and I’ll be glad of your company.”

“You said once,” said Rob, with a streak of sun-

shine on his face, "when I asked you to take me over—that you 'chose your own company.'"

"Ain't I choosin' my own company?" said I. "I'd rather have you sail with me—honest, Rob—than any other man I ever met anywheres, not exceptin' Power Lot, God Help Us."

Any other man. I did not know then that Rob had heard Mary Stingaree that moonlight evening, when she said slightlyly that he "was not a man at all." I did not know why in thunder such a high light blazed from his face at my words. A sail to Waldeck to sell potatoes wouldn't seem much of an ambition to anyone who had once possessed what Rob Hilton was born heir to. But there, thought I, he's been shut off here so long, the prospect of the sail is like wine to him.

His shoulders were set mighty square, considering what seemed the childishness of his emotion, and the way he gripped my hand proved that the old salt ham he'd played with in the Stingaree shed must have suffered some severities before he got through with it.

"I won't forget this, Jim," says he; and he added with regular eagerness, as I turned away, "I think my first crop will be ready in about three weeks, now."

"I'm your man," says I, "when you're ready."

I forgot that it was customary to drive *down* the hill by the Joggins road, and I took the steep way, never heeding. The old horse condoned my forgetfulness with perfect wisdom of his own. The descent was an enterprise that required care, and in spite of my pricking and urging, he did most certainly take entirely his own time for the job.

Captain Belcher and another compatriot saluted my ultimate landing on level soil.

"I've won," said Belcher.

"What about?" I asked.

"Why, Ed Nedds an' me was bettin', for the last three or four hours, as to whether ye was goin' up the hill or down it. I took the caution to jedge by lan'-marks, an' I bet 'down,' an' here ye be, Capting. I consider that I ain't wasted no time watchin' of ye, neither, for it was an interestin' inch-wormin' a sight as I ever see."

CHAPTER XV

SHE OF THE WHIP-HAND

MARY STINGAREE and the doctor sat out on the porch together; vines hid its rotting timbers; beauty covered all defects during the brief marvelously bright summer in this northern clime. The little porch faced the grandeur of the scene.

"I could not write it to you," said Mary. "It seemed too dreadful; he was doing so well, until they enticed him down there, and he fell—he drank again—and—was married; trapped into it, I understand, but married, to a little French-Canadian girl down there at the River."

"Yes, I heard that rumor. The man who brought me up here—James Turbine—seems to think it possible there might be some mistake about that. He says the truth concerning that affair all lies with a certain 'Captain Belcher,' if he could only be made to speak the truth. The few other participants, including Rob himself, were too muddled to take away any impressions of the scene that would serve as reliable statistics."

"Surely the girl herself would know."

"She is as courageous as Captain Belcher, I am told. What she affirms, that will she swear to, and blench not, neither be confused."

"It is possible then, you mean, that Rob was not married to her?"

“‘Jim’ Turbine certainly intimated that such a doubt was admissible.”

“But Rob himself virtually acknowledges it, and—though he has never gone to live with them down there—he is working with all his might to make a home for her.”

“I shall have the mystery solved and the truth brought to light. Everything I hear, with the exception of that one fall, seems creditable to Rob. It was a case of ‘kill or cure,’—and it begins to look like ‘cure.’ He was doomed, body and soul, in the life he was pursuing. He was never sober long enough to look comprehensively and connectedly into his own affairs or assume any worthy responsibility concerning them. To fill his pockets with cash and carouse it away, was the end and aim of his bright being. His father was a pleasure-lover too, but he had a keen business sense. The property is safely and conservatively invested, and is waxing greater every day of Rob’s life; and he, I believe now, will grow to his responsibilities. A—a woman whom he had learned to adore—a good woman—a strong woman—could pilot him through, *I believe.*”

Mary, too, saw in the great man’s eyes the exhaustion of a spiritual fight, the self-immolation of the dog who strikes out once more to save.

“I hope that all present complications may clear for poor Rob’s sake,” she said, “and that he may find such a woman.”

“He has not lived under the same roof with *you*, these past months,” declared the man, with an emotion not to be mistaken, “without suffering, climbing, hoping; without realizing to the depths of his soul *who*

that woman is that absorbs him, exalts him, stings him to despair."

He rose and stood for a moment with half-averted face, one arm uplifted to a vine-clad pillar of the porch.

"I am forced to remember"—Mary spoke with an intensity that had driven the color from her lips—"that my own father was an inebriate, and that my brother is one. I do not entertain the thoughts that some entertain. My life, though stainless itself I know, lies by way of sacrifice, but not by way of increasing, perhaps, the sum of evil."

"Nonsense"—he faced her—"I am a physician, as you know. I believe no man living has had a wider experience at least, of the human constitution and its limitations, and its possibilities. I tell you your assertion is nonsense. A man *can* grow out of evil, a man *can* change his nature, in weeks, months, in a day, in an hour. God lives and works by ceaseless 'miracles.' New growth, new life. Nature proves it. Heredity is the bugbear of all the old Back-Numbers in existence. God laughs that theory to scorn, if we only had the eyes to see, and the courage to rise and *live*."

Mary, long quietly rusting at Power Lot, God Help Us, shrank a little from this startling mental antagonist. She was quite ready to turn the flow of the theme to lightness.

A smile dawned in her eyes.

"Thank you. I am well aware that I am an old 'Back-Number.'"

"Nonsense, again." The truth of him would not be withstood. "I love you till my heart is torn past con-

trol. Will you answer me?" he continued gently. "I have asked you this question before. You know my life, my reputation—celebrity, I may say without vainglory, since I want to present this case as alluringly as possible. My fortune is large, my character well proven. Mary—will you marry me?"

"No, oh no. You are cruel. Do not ask me that."

"You do not love me in the least like that?"

"No, oh no. Why, when one is in straits, do people think only of themselves?"

"Why, indeed? Well, I will think of myself no more." He returned to his chair, easily resting his arm on the chair-arm, and his iron-gray head on his hand; but the side of his face toward her was plain to view, strong, tender, his eyes looking out seaward. A qualm went to her heart, that ached with admiration and with pity. He would have renewed the bright sun of his youth, but his sorrow was above all things considerate and brave.

"I did not mean that," she stammered. "You are unselfish and great. But I—I think you mistake my power; my power over poor Rob, for instance. He is interesting; he is fascinating"—she smiled—"in one way, I admit, to a mind that has had so many stern realities to deal with as I have, he is so easily made joyous. Whatever his mood, he has a child's heart; though he has lived in the midst of sophistication and excess, he has kept a certain bright soul of his own, unblemished. I cannot express it in any better way, but you understand. I thought at one time that I *had* influence over him—unconsciously, in the sense that it was more, much more, than I desired to have——"

The color swept over her face.

"I understand," said Doctor Margate, "perfectly."

"You may rest assured that now, though he is always courteous, he quite avoids me," she continued. "The utmost of my feeling toward him has been such—such, I should imagine, as a mother might feel toward an—an engaging, but unfortunate, child."

"That feeling, even unmodified, in its very essence, goes a long way," replied the man, still gazing calmly seaward; "farther than you know, or dream of."

"But," Mary made haste to continue, "there is an actual tie involving a weaker appeal still, far weaker, in the case of my poor brother. I have not much opportunity for the studying of joy in any nature."

Bate, to her intense mortification, was making himself heard in the kitchen in an angry disapproval of her temporary withdrawal from active affairs and his delayed supper.

Doctor Margate divined much. "Poor girl—poor child," he said; "let me help you with that burden, with any burden, just as your old friend. Upon my soul, I will be content if you will only let me help you."

He reached out his hand and laid it lightly, though with a gesture of infinite protection, upon hers.

It was at this juncture that Rob appeared. He had seen Bate enter the house with that aggressive manner of importance which indicated an inward replenishing from some vinous resource at the River. Perished, in that instant, Rob's distaste for meeting Doctor Margate—in the thought that Mary "might need him." So he marched in, giving the noisy Bate a look of stern meaning on his way through the house to the porch

door. Their backs were turned to him, but he heard the low pleading of Doctor Margate's voice and saw the hand laid protectingly upon hers.

A cold hand wrung his vitals dry of all sensation for a moment. Then he caught his breath and advanced to the doctor with a cordiality so correct and firm that it was visibly altogether Spartan. The good man's pleased exclamations at his health, his tan, his vigor, hardly pierced his consciousness. He knew that Mary was in a dilemma, that she would have been pleased to invite the doctor to supper, that it was impossible on account of Bate.

"By the way," said Rob, with a splendid affectation of social ease, "I come as an emissary from Mrs. Stafford, who is anxious to see her guest, and who has her supper all prepared. May I escort you over, Doctor, and introduce you to your hostess?"

"Thank you. Good—I'll go at once. But see here, boy—why, you're *grand*," he exclaimed, holding Rob off. "Why, I'd give my money and my Sunday coat to look as you do. Is this Rob Hilton, or Saint Michael, Saint George, and Saint Glory stepping out of a picture frame? Bless you, lad, I'm more glad than you know to see you again."

Rob acknowledged these hearty encomiums but dully. What did it all signify to him? Mary was indeed forever lost to him. When he came back to his own meal he heard Bate even from a distance, pursuing a harsh, bumptious, brutal discourse with Mary.

"See here, for a girl that sets up to be as good as you be, you have a mighty suspicious lot o' men hangin' 'round ye. I wouldn't put on sanctimony, an' then

act like the devil, ef I was you. Ye'd better be honest, 't least. Who was that cussid old dude settin' out thar' on the porch with ye, anyway? I wanted ter mow out in front thar', an' ye had ter go an' plank yerselves down thar', shameless critturs."

It came to Rob, in a hot wave of recollection, *this* was the being with whom he had aimed to affiliate on first arriving at Power Lot, to whom he had appealed for a mutual clandestine procuring of the drink that had been a curse to them both. Shame and humiliation actually scorched him at this remembrance of the devils which had so vilely possessed him. He listened trembling, too, with anger.

"Bate," said Mary very calmly, "if you ever speak to me in that way again, I will appeal to Mrs. Stafford, whom you have more reason than one to fear. I know that you are hardly responsible, and I am patient, but you must be *decent*, do you hear me?"

"A nice sister I got," snarled Bate. "Bad herself, an' schemin' all the time to git *me* into trouble."

"Oh, but how I have worked and sacrificed myself to keep you out of trouble," cried Mary passionately, at last, "and you malign and insult me."

"Yer can't prove I took old Byjo's money," asserted Bate stolidly, but Rob detected the fear in his tone; "it's yer d—d suspicions. She prob'ly hid it away, an' then laid the loss of it onto other folks."

"We won't discuss a matter of which we both thoroughly understand the truth; but if you speak brutally to me again, I will appeal to her to let you suffer the consequences from which we've so long tried to shield you."

"Ye will, will ye? ye d—d sneakin', meddlin——"

Through the half-opened door Rob, unbelieving, saw Bate advancing upon Mary with upraised fists. He sprang like a lion; it was the work of but one instant of ecstatic indignation, and Bate lay stretched on the kitchen floor at his feet. Before he could stagger up the avenging hand had felled him again.

"You would strike *her*, would you—you would strike *her*," Rob hissed, sobbed, through his teeth; "you would strike *her*. Oh, my God."

Bate, half rising, reached for a knife that lay on the table. Rob kicked it fiercely from his hand, and seizing a rope that hung from a nail on the wall, and kneeling on the infuriated wretch, he tied him hand and foot. Imprecations, vile accusations were hurled at them both. Mary stood by, white as if laid in her grave.

"There," gasped Rob, rising from his knees, "let him lie there—till he's safe. Never mind what he says, never mind; it's of no consequence what he says."

He thought that Mary would fall. "Come, Miss Stingaree," he said naturally, persuasively, as if *she* were the child, and he seeking to restore her to a normal realization of existence again; "come, we must get some supper. Will you help me? Bate will consent to behave himself and get up and eat with us, by and by. Come, show me what to do."

They made but a sad and poor pretense at eating. Mary placed Bate's supper to keep it warm, and went over to him where he lay.

"Bate," she said sorrowfully, "won't you try to think for a moment how I have kept you free, how I

have tried to help you always? I want to keep you free and to help you now; but you must not lie about people, nor abuse and strike them. You will promise not to do that? you will swear by the memory of our poor mother? Oh, Bate, my brother."

The pleading in her voice choked her utterance, tears welled in her eyes as she entreated him. Bate gave a long angry sneer.

"Bate," said Rob, his lips tightening with pain as he watched the extremity of Mary's grief, he also undertaking to plead, for her sake, "I couldn't see you strike *her*; sure, you would have killed yourself afterward if you had done such a thing. Come, promise what she asks, for your own sake. I will untie you. Let's be friends, let's try to do better, let's help each other on. I've a quick temper myself, I know."

Another long snort of scorn from Bate. But just at this moment Mrs. Byjo stepped in briskly.

"Well," she declared, "if a good appetite is a compliment to a provider, my boarder has set me up, and no mistake. I know when people eat to be polite, and when they eat because they want to. He apologized once or twice. 'Go right ahead,' says I, 'I'm as able-bodied at the mixin' bowl as I am at the plow.' He's finished, at last, and gone off gappin' at the view. You'd think this was the only real up-and-down, helter-skelter, far-reachin' piece o' lan'scape on the sphere by the way any strange-comer stan's an' opens his mouth at it—Why, what's the matter?" she exclaimed, discovering Bate stretched on the floor in a dimming corner of the room.

"What ye been doing, Bate?" she questioned the

supine one with paralyzing force of directness. "I know. Ye've been tryin' to abuse somebody—to harm and hurt somebody; and ye promised me straight, when I let ye off, ye promised me ye wouldn't."

Mrs. Byjo usually carried her whip with her. She had it now, and she brought the lash around with a sharp crack.

"'Fraid to let him up, are you, Mary and Rob?" she inquired staunchly; "well, *I* ain't afraid to let him up." She stepped bravely forth and untied the knots that bound him, then she swung back and gave her lash a clear and resounding snap in the air, as it were, by way of experiment. Bate did not stir.

"Get up, by Jo," she commanded him, with the utmost cheerfulness, "or I'll thrash ye layin' down."

To the astonishment of Mary and Rob, Bate rose to his feet, the whole contour of his face and shoulders being that of sheepish obedience.

"*Now*, do ye promise," she adjured him, "and promise to keep, this time? Sw'ar it then, sw'ar it by the knockin's over at Spook House. Disobey *them*, and see what'll come to ye."

Bate, very pale, nodded a subdued acquiescence, "I sw'ar."

"There's such folks as Bate in this world," continued Mrs. Byjo, lapsing from the sterner measures of her course to philosophize frankly and helpfully in the downcast face of her pupil. "Some says there's not. Some talk about everlastin' lovin'-kindness and patience; and you've showed it, Mary Stingaree. You've showed it to Bate Stingaree."

She pointed the handle of her whip from one to the

other as a simple and emphatic manner of elucidating her theme.

“Now, what Bate Stingaree needs, it appears, ain’t lovin’-kindness, for it’s been tried on him, and he ain’t got sense enough to know it when he sees it; he thinks lovin’-kindness is a coward and afraid of him. What Bate Stingaree needs and admires, by Jo, is the whip.” She gave hers another sonorous free-hearted crack in the air.

“Bate Stingaree’s got to be born again, like the man up the tree, ’t the ministers preach about. I’ve got my opinions, and I believe he’ll have his chance, and ef not in this world then in some world he *will* git born again till he turns out decent. Meanwhiles what he needs an’ asks for in his very soul, poor feller, is the whip. And, Bate,” she added with perfect friendliness of sympathy, “I’ve got some for ye, whenever ye feel a hankerin’ after it, and bear you well in mind, young feller, I’ve got the whip-hand o’ ye.”

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. PROUTY OF PROUTY'S NECK

It was Rob's custom to work in the long, long twilight after supper. From six o' the clock to ten he made another day. This evening he did not change once more into his old clothes and go into the field; his heart was too restless. Doctor Margate would soon appear for another chat with Mary, and he, Rob, would be in the way. Bate had devoured his supper contemptuously and gone the way of the River. Rob sought to still the tumult in his brain by a solitary stroll of his own along the heights.

Passing through the dooryard he espied the astounding vision of a choice—an especially choice—cigar lying in the grass. He hesitated a moment, then stooped and picked it up; it was one that had been quenched almost as soon as lighted, gallantly tossed away by the doctor when he had first met Mary on the porch. Rob observed how intact it was, put it sweetly to his nostrils; ah, no molasses and ginger in this product. He made a mouthpiece of a bit of paper, inserted the cigar, and puffed rapturously as he tramped on. Velvet reclining chairs, blazing chandeliers, soft-footed attendants, the clink of iced champagne—all swayed his senses once more in seductive memory, with the fumes of that delicious cigar. A hearty voice broke the spell.

“Hold on, Rob, I can't keep up with you.” Doctor

Margate overtook him, breathing rather heavily, and laid a hand on Rob's shoulder.

"Ah, my boy, not so very long ago you could not keep up with me. And, now—but even in my heyday I had not your physique. Ah, but you're to be envied—envied." The doctor spoke with exuberant frankness, his hand still resting on Rob's shoulder.

"That"—thought Rob—"is his considerate way of appearing not to have noticed the fact that I'm smoking his discarded cigar." It was such a bald confession of penury, of classical beggardom, of hopeless, weary, utter resignation, to smoke a cigar that one has picked up in the yard. Rob's face had been dyed with blushes. But after the first hot wave, despair makes a man fearless and bold; and he said:

"You are the one to be envied, Doctor Margate—if you are engaged to Mary Stingaree."

"But I'm not, Rob. Let's walk on a little. I am not. I asked her, but she would not have me."

Rob said nothing. Wonder, infinite relief, the pang of hopeless love on his own part, pity and a sudden mood of valiant championship for the doctor; all these possessed him.

"Life is no tangle here, is it, Rob?" said the great man, looking away to the scene spread before them. "Plain toil, plain struggle, the river, the basin, then the tremendous tides out yonder;—what is that passage there? What do you call it?"

"The Gut."

"Aye, out through the Gut at last, into the open—and, faith, but God works well. We'll believe that, though the cup we long for gets dashed from our lips."

He stood with bared head, and seemed to forget where he stood as he gazed. Bob looked at the familiar gray head and rapt face. It appeared that Rob himself was seeing visions. The gaudy tinsel of the cigar laden atmosphere faded out of sight and sound, and cathedral organs of the long-ago pealed through his senses with revelations, with aspirations, dim to him once, divinely clear to him in this instant;—and life was not much, and death was not much, but only to play true, that was all.

“You have doubted me a good deal, I suppose, Robert?”

Rob woke from his trance and met the doctor face to face.

“No, never—your honesty. I can remember still how my father used to talk about you. But I’ve written you and never received any answer, and I do not understand. It is very strange, it seems to me, that a fortune such as my father left should go to the dogs so completely and suddenly as mine did. What was the matter? Is not there anything to be saved out of it?”

“Oh, a great deal to be saved—a great deal, Rob, my boy. Go back to New York to-morrow, if you want to, and find out for yourself whether those who have the stewardship have been faithful.”

Rob gasped. His own revulsion of feeling staggered him. Mary—never to see her more. Mary—left in the house with Bate, unprotected. The sea, the land, even his crop of potatoes—the wondrous product at last of his painful toils—the very air he breathed, all seemed dear to him of a sudden, and he spoke impulsively, almost fiercely, words strange to his own ears.

"I don't want to go back," he said.

"I understand, Rob. I would not go back yet, if I were you."

So absorbed were the two in their own thoughts they did not realize that they were passing Caroline Treet's house. She, however, had heard of the celebrated man's arrival at Power Lot; and Rob saw her standing in her own porch door and beckoning with a black kid-gloved hand.

"Look out, she's got on her black kid gloves; she's going to make a set at you, Doctor," he murmured low.

"She—who? You amaze me—that so handsome a woman should be put to it to pluck adorers from a foreign tree. Who is she?"

"Come in," called Caroline smoothly; "friends known and unknown, come right into the Room."

For, at Power Lot, God Help Us, they called the parlor or place of state simply the *Room*, and to enter it was, in itself, to fulfill the holiest of social obligations. Not every family had a "room," but as for Caroline Treet, hers contained more bouquets from the grass of forgotten harvests, and mortuary wreaths under arched glass, and portraits, framed in sea-spoil, of those gone before, than, perhaps, any other house in Power Lot, and though she was considered everywhere as more of a kind-hearted than a vain woman, yet she could not quite banish from her manner, especially when in the very presence of these relics, a certain palmy and serene consciousness of elegance.

"Be pleased to seat yourselves, friends known and unknown." Caroline repeated the happy phrase with a

soft emphasis on the "unknown," and the doctor's heart might be supposed to thrill; but he had a less sentimental emergency to reckon with, for the "room" being shut dark, and his glasses in his vest pocket, he sat down hopefully on what proved to be a very stout woman, who repudiated him with the angry lash of her arms and a scream of unflattering disgust.

"May God forgive me," drawled Caroline, at once letting in some light through a shutter; "fade as fade may, let's see what's going on here amongst ourselves." On discovering the doctor standing dismayed and immovable in the safe center of the room, she sought to reassure him through the methods of a formal presentation:

"Let me introduce you to Mis' Prouty of Prouty's Neck."

Mrs. Prouty of Prouty's Neck observed the doctor's low and remorseful bow without much concern either way. Her mind, it was plain, was absorbed in another grievance. The light through the shutters revealed also two boys, respectively seven and eight years of age, their faces likewise distorted with misery.

"They been talkin' all winter an' all spring about comin' over to the Baptis' 'cherry-carnival,' an' I made 'em some decent clo's, the Lord knows how, an' fetched 'em over an' paid fifteen cents apiece for 'em, like all the rest—that filled up to the brim an' runnin' over—an' after all this how-de-do an' takin'-on that's nearly wore me out"—expounded Mrs. Prouty, the indignant mother—"them little sneaks pimped up all of a sudden without no warnin', like a colicky hummin' bird, an' never et five cents worth, the two on 'em together."

"We thought as how there'd be *cherries* to a cherry carnival," complained the older boy loudly, taking courage from the extended dimensions of his audience.

"An' when it was explained to you that this wan't the bearin'-year f'r cherries, you little slouches put yerselves in rebellion ag'in the Lord on high, 'stead o' con-dimentin' down all the good vittles ye could hold like the rest on us with sweet pickles an' be thankful."

"The pickles they giv' *me* wan't sweet," declared the boy, in tones of cold and resentful recollection.

"Hear to him!" cried the exasperated Mrs. Prouty.

"'Sides, we et more bread 'n meat 'n anybody else thar'," now spake the younger, rising stoutly to his brother's defense.

"Bread and meat!" sneered Mrs Prouty; "makin' wild hoodoos o' yerselves, as though ye'd never seen Christian dainties afore an' was scared of 'em."

"I wan't afraid," maintained the elder. "I tasted onto ev'ry kind o' pie an' cake the' was."

"An' why didn't ye eat 'em?"

"'Cos," he explained, without any nice reservations, "they tasted jest like your ha'r ile *smells*, Ma."

"Vanilla's a mighty expensive spice, you little wild b'ar's cub."

"I can't help that, Ma," he answered, having now grown quite bold; "it makes me want ter vomick."

"Wal', when an air of wind comes up your father 'll be over to sail us home, an' thar' you'll stay f'r all o' any carnival you'll ever go to ag'in."

The boy, now verging on the bounds of the "saucy," was about to express, to his mother's wrath, his com-

plete satisfaction with this dictum, when Doctor Margate himself interposed.

"I—I came to this beautiful country, hoping to find cherries, too," he advised the boys, and they read him literally, nor realized the depth of pathos in the great man's confession; "but for me too, I find it is not a cherry-bearing year. I doubt if I shall ever gather many more cherries. But I like little boys who prefer bread and meat to cake; such good sense deserves its reward, and I wish your good mother would take this slight appreciation of my regard for you and spend it for you as she deems wisest."

It was a five-dollar note, and the disaffected family clasped each other's hands and beamed as one. "That pays for not having them fill up, doesn't it?" the doctor inquired of the mother in his simple way, that was on a rational and unassuming level with the crying needs of any situation.

"A few minutes ago," replied Mrs. Prouty, "I really didn't know what I come for. But the guidin'-hand was after me same as usual. I was meant to come, an' I come, an' now I see why I come."

She clasped the greatly augmented treasures of her purse firmly.

"And now, Mis' Prouty," said Mrs. Treet hospitably, "you'll take off your things, bein' far away an' seldom seen, an' make yourself to home?"

"No," responded Mrs. Prouty gracefully, "I'll set here jest as I be an' pray for an air o' wind. I was never one that felt easy settin' 'round away from home. But I'm glad to see ye, Car'line. What's this I hear about old man Trawles?"

The question was so uncompromisingly put it reflected the terrors of a court of law, and the whole company appeared startled.

Except Caroline.

"Oh my, ya-as, what's this I hear, an' what's that I hear?" she murmured discursively. "Somebody on ev'ry hand is allus hearin' somethin'. The neighbors drops in here often, an' allus welcome received an' their yarns listened to, whatsoever. Cap'n Belcher was passin' this mornin' an' reeled me off a yarn, that, ef it's true, some folks in an' around' Power Lot, God Help Us, is ignorant enough to need missionaries sent to 'em, an' no more so amongst them that fries in the sun naked on the isles o' the sea. What think you?"

They were all too interested to push their inquiries further than by the appeal of open mouths. Only the doctor said kindly:

"What was his yarn?"

Caroline blushed; her attitude toward the doctor seemed to be eminently that of approval, and the rest realized that for all practical purposes her audience was an audience of one.

"You don't know old Tim Tibbits, 't 's kind o' half baked—in the line o' bein' silly, I mean—an' allus aroun' in the woods, huntin'?"

"Not yet," replied the doctor earnestly; "I do not know him *yet*."

"Wal', perhaps you won't be so anxious to make his acquaintance after you hear what was told to me. Cap'n Belcher swore it was true in ev'ry line an' precep' of it, an' I leave him to his Judge, only tellin' of it as he told me. 'T seems, one o' these 'ere religious agents,

Church o' England this one must 'a' been—wal', he lit onto this region, prospectin' around, with his arms full o' prayer an' hymnal books; an' what should he do, to get a sample o' the folks 'round here, but run afoul, first thing, o' old Tim Tibbits hailin' out o' the bresh with his gun slung over his shoulder.

“ ‘Good-mornin', sir,’ says the man, to Tim; ‘are there any ‘Piscopalians round here?’ says he; ‘an’ whar’, ef you please, be they, sir?’ says he.

“ ‘‘Piscopalians?’ says old Tim Tibbits—who’s allus got to be good-natered an’ oblige everybody, whether he knows what they mean or not. ‘‘Piscopalians?—wal’, now I think on it,’ says he, scratchin’ his old fool of a head, ‘I *did* see somethin’ queer over thar’ by the aidge o’ Fin’ly’s woods this mornin’,’ says he, ‘but I didn’t fire. Yes,’ says he, ‘now I think on it, that must ‘a’ been it,’ says he, an’ grinned at him all over in his obligin’ way; ‘but I was goin’ down to the store to sell my skunks’ fur, an’ I never stopped to fire,’ says he; ‘why, do you want one?’ says he.

“ ‘‘No,’ says the man an’ walked on, an’ wobbled his coat tails direc’ right out o’ sight an’ hearin’ o’ the whole place, never stoppin’ to exchange a word with somebody ‘t was more ‘n half-witted, so as to get a better sample; but lit right out; an’ how he’ll spread it ‘round about us here, only the Lord knows; but as for me I consider that our luck was poor, an’ the sample, so fur as I have any feelin’s, one that I should never have selected to have myself spread abroad by.”

“Them that is ignorant won’t have it laid to their charge,” said Mrs. Prouty of Prouty’s Neck, solemnly.

“I s’pose not,” said Caroline, “but I’d rather have

somethin' charged up ag'in me, and not be quite so simple, I believe."

"It must 'a' been the same agent," continued Mrs. Prouty, "that hove along thro' the Neck a spell ago; an' talkin' o' samples, Car'line, I doubt ef he took a much better one off us, an' ef you got spread around for your innercence we're likely spread fur an' wide for our wickedness, him tumblin' first thing onto Rip Wiz'll, an' askin' of him, 'Have you giv' yourself to the Lord?' 'Giv' myself to the Lord!' says Rip Wiz'll, says he—'who in nation is a-goin to do my hayin?' "

"Bad as that is," said Caroline, surveying the rigid expression of Mrs. Prouty's features without dismay, and folding her own gloved hands elegantly; "the's somethin' cuter about it, after all, than the' is in the sample we've gone out by."

"How long ye goin' to stay to Virginny's?" Mrs. Prouty inquired of Doctor Margate, in her severely inquisitorial tone, turning to him without other warning.

Doctor Margate, quite unacquainted with the first name of his hostess—Mrs. Byjo—was at a loss for an instant, but made answer:

"Only a very short time, I regret to say, madam."

"Maybe it's as well," said Mrs. Prouty without further explanation; but Caroline knew that she referred in this discreet way to the potency of her (Caroline's) own charms amongst the male sex; and she was neither vexed thereby nor did she preen herself with vanity, but remained as ever the serene queen of her own drawing-room.

"Mary Stingaree's a girl," she murmured oppor-

tunely, "that, ef you can't respec' her then who *can* you respec'?"

The company turned their thought of one accord into the trend of Caroline's leading, save Mrs. Prouty, who leaped regardless to a conclusion out of sight:

"You done mighty poorly, Robert Hilton," she said, fixing her inflexible gaze on poor Rob. "From all we hear to Prouty's Neck, ye've let them Tee-bos scoop ye in. Ye're a shapely, pleasin' young man, an' ye ought ter done better."

This challenge lying by way of severe reproach untinged by condolence, Rob, having no defense prepared, was about to let the case go by default, when Doctor Margate fixed the redoubtable Mrs. Prouty with an unflinching eye of his own; so great was the kindness of his expression, however, she forbore, for the moment, to exercise her own tremendous and daring habit of speech.

"Madam," he said, "pardon me for regarding you with so persistent a look. I am trying to place you among some members of royalty whom it was my good fortune to see when I was last abroad. It is a resemblance more than striking, it is phenomenal."

"You're gittin' 'em mixed up, Doctor Maggut," interposed the indissolubly tranquil and sweet tones of Caroline Treet; "that's Virginny Stafford you're thinkin' of, not Mis' Prouty. Mis' Prouty's folks wa'n't descended from nothin' as was ever heered tell on."

"The most that can be said for 'em, on the Prouty side, anyway," assented Mrs. Prouty, in full confirmation of Caroline's words, "is, that they was a vary

triflin' lot. My mother's folks was, a considerable number of 'em, law-abidin', stay-to-home people; but the Proutys has got weak spots, which why should I conceal when all the world knows? It use' to be said o' Lob Prouty, my husband's father, and Biltmur Treet, Car'line's husban's father, that ef there'd been any science known in them days—as the' is now—they might 'a' been smart men, pokin' into some kind o' science 't 'ud interested 'em maybe an' kep' 'em out o' mischief, like new-fangled doctorin' an' universal' preachin' an' goin' up in a balloon an' these machines that run without no horses, an' what-not; but as it was they hadn't no outlet, an' gophered around here an' thar' over the 'arth that they was a cuss to, tell they dropped off o' old age, a mercy to themselves an' them 't had to put up with their everlastin' pryin' an' peevishness."

"We that have an outlet ought to be thankful indeed," replied the doctor, and made no further effort to compel or hypnotize the astounding force of Mrs. Prouty of Prouty's Neck.

"Mis' Prouty's kind o' abrup'," Caroline explained "but her heart's in the right place, ef we only know whar' to look for it."

"Wal', I shan't deny you that, Car'line; it's along o' my husban' an' children an' the old home to Prouty's Neck; it ain't watchin' out f'r to make a second ch'ice; not even ef Prouty was gone, men might hang around me as thick as blueberries an' ask me on their knees, they wouldn't git no 'ncouragement from me."

While Rob and the doctor realized the hopelessness of the situation, Caroline remained blandly impervious to the plain reprimand which had been hurled at her.

"I believe you, Mis' Prouty," she rejoined; "the wonder was that you married at all, considerin' the smartness and independence o' your ways, an' men bein' o' that kind that likes to keep the upper hand an' do the bossin' their own selves. All women air not like you, Mis' Prouty," said Caroline, with a look of the beautiful clinging-vine sort toward the admiring doctor,—“but some enjoys themselves better to *lean onto* than to order an' direc'. I say it freely, I'm one o' that kind that, ef I take up with a man, I'd rather lean onto him than be forever bossin' of him 'round; an', so long as my man was above ground—or out o' water, perhaps I'd ought to say, for bein' seafarin' he went by way o' water; but, afore God in his wisderm took him, I leaned onto him—whenever he was in port, that is.”

“Git out o' here,” Mrs. Prouty suddenly commanded her two boys gravely, “an' see ef there's an air o' wind stirrin'.” But she spoke to empty places; the boys had slipped out some time before without either her knowledge or approval.

“In my humble judgment,” said Caroline, who had taken an occasional outlook through the shutters, “they've made tracks for home along shore. I've raised boys, and I know their ways. They didn't set contented one minute whilst they was in the Room.”

“It's eight miles 'round the shore,” exclaimed Mrs. Prouty, and then sighed heavily, “Wal', I don't know 's I blame 'em.”

“And thar's Dan Prouty, now,” said Caroline, in a discerning voice, “sailing' straight into the Basin.”

Mrs. Prouty rose promptly. “I'll be down thar', time he lands,” she said. “All of present company, and

none excepted, I shall be glad to see you over to Prouty's Neck." She shook hands all 'round as if a solemn commitment of fate hung over every individual there present.

"I feel pleased to think ye clum' the hill to see me," Caroline assured her; "ye're allus welcome, and the sooner the better."

"You was allus my favorite among the girls, Car'line," said Mrs. Prouty, surveying her as though she would recall that lost soul from its flirtatious designs to better things.

Rob and the doctor also made their exit from the Room.

"I am going back to the safe charms of Mary Stingaree and Mrs. Stafford," said the doctor to Rob at the gate. "Mary has refused me, and Mrs. Stafford would not want me, anyway; but Mrs. Prouty and Caroline Treet are dangerous in the way they interest a man."

Rob giggled.

"I don't know," continued the doctor gravely, "whether I wanted most to subjugate Mrs. Prouty or stand as the oak for Caroline Treet to lean upon, but these are unbecoming thoughts. I little knew what was impending when you called my attention to the beckoning of those black kid gloves. And the Room, too. The salons of old and luxurious civilizations have not so absorbing an atmosphere. I am going back to sit with Mary and Mrs. Stafford on the porch, and gaze off on the sentinel bluffs and the vast outlying ocean."

The doctor did not once smile. It occurred to Rob that where he himself saw lots of fun, and gave in return the utmost of kindly sympathy, the great man

saw spheres of individual existence moving still with sublime accord in their eccentric orbits, and stood awed and touched before the spectacle. A certain pique of satisfaction was in Rob's soul, that he should have introduced the doctor by chance to so choice an interview.

"Well, I'll stroll on and see some more of my friends," said Rob.

"More?" said the doctor, turning a backward look on the bright young face. "Well, you have them, and they—have you; and of such is the kingdom——"

The last low words escaped Rob as he marched on, smiling.

CHAPTER XVII

SKIPPER'S WIFE AND RHODY

ROB could smile, for though Mary Stingaree was out of his reach, no one else had won her; even the celebrated Margate had come a-courting in vain. Sordid life had bound him, and he was a fighter of beasts, but now for a little space he roamed kingdom-free in his own imaginings.

A little old woman standing on the top rail of a picket fence, her wrinkled face young with good fellowship, gathering lilacs of the choicest out of the reach of the common herd in honor of his approach—this met his eye, and he rushed to her.

"But, Mother Skipper," he gasped, taking her in his arms, "you must not, you might fall." He put her tenderly down to earth. Her arms were full of rare bunches of lilacs, and she did not care. "Pooh," she remarked, "I'm *spry*."

Skipper himself, rigging up the well-sweep near at hand, laughed indulgently.

"You, Rob Hilton," he exclaimed, "runnin' an' huggin' a ga'l, jest as soon as ye clap eyes on her. *Me*, all over—what I use' ter be afore rheumatiz got holt of me."

"I know it," Rob answered, "but what are you going to do when some are so handsome you can't help yourself, and so *spry*"—he added—"that you'd have hard work to catch them."

"Land sakes alive," said Mrs. Skipper, with pleasant disgust, "ef you two don't make a pair."

"Spry!" echoed Skipper wistfully; "why, I'm eighty, and when the rheumatiz ain't on me I c'n jump up, yit, an' hit my heels tergether three times 'fore I tetch to 'arth."

"The last time's gittin' to sound kind o' faint, though, Skipper," said his wife, with conscientious literalness.

"Mebby you're gittin' a little deaf?"

"No, I'm extry good o' hearin', as you know well, Skipper. How much could *you* hear with the wads o' cotton-battin that I' got stuffed inter my ears? Whilst to me the sound only comes pleasanter—it's too loud when I don't have my wads in."

Skipper admitted the truth of this with a look of proud confirmation directed toward Rob.

"Somebody a-preachin' to the River split her eardrums with his chantey," he explained, "and she's wore them breakwaters in her ears ever sence."

"It wa'n't his chantey, Skipper; 'twas his prayin'."

"Chantey or prayin', what's the odds? he stunted ye with his racket," mildly continued Skipper, in full explanation.

"He done it to alarm souls," proceeded Mrs. Skipper, in grave extenuation of the offense which had smitten her own acute sense so grievously; "an' some there was that needed it"—she regarded Skipper contemplatively—never accusingly—"but *they* was not there. Only them was there that had been alarmed long ago and got all settled down after it, and the wrong way was took with 'em; all that was there felt it."

"She ain't been down to meet'n sence," said Skipper, in a tone of great self-congratulation.

"But I aint give up the Lord, Skipper. I hold my own communin's, an' I keep the Sabbath day stricter 'n what I ever did, or than any does that goes down to meetin'. I seen some tourists trompin' around on the beach last Sunday, an' it made my heart ache to think o' sech a dessic'ation. My folks was meetin'-going folks, an' ef we don't hang on to our principles where be we? High water or low, gale or ca'm, there's nothin' could tempt me to go explorin' around on the beach on the Sabbath Day."

Rob, who never failed of a Sunday ramble along shore; and Skipper, who stole on that day of sacred observance as lovingly to the surf as if it had been his father and his mother—both hung their heads silently, though not without a sense of pride in Mrs. Skipper's facile walk among the religious proprieties, and a marvel at those moral distinctions, so dim to them, which she so well knew how to define; above all, a hidden hope, perhaps, of holding on by her skimpy little old-fashioned skirts for a smuggled passage through those final spiritual reckonings where she was so safe and they so wide and tumultuously at sea.

"Ache an' pain, pain an' ache, beat an' throb, throb an' beat, an' sometimes roll an' toss," said Skipper, changing the subject, and pathetically stroking his knees—"toss an' roll——"

"Ye sleep like a log, Skipper," Mrs. Skipper corrected him gently.

"You don't know what I suffer sometimes in the middle o' the night," said Skipper, his exceeding young

and beautiful eyes wandering with a wild plaintiveness toward the horizon of mingled sea and sky.

"Ye never felt so much as yer conscience vexin' of ye, Skipper, but what ye'd wake me up an' start me for the camfire bottle. But women is better sufferers 'n men, as all the worl' knows."

"She took on dretful, dretful, when our only darter died," said Skipper to Rob meaningly; "we was afeard she'd lose her reason. Wal', wal'," he went on tenderly withdrawing his eyes from Mrs. Skipper's downcast face, "I've had ter do it, Rob. Come the season, I couldn't stan' it no longer. I've got me a boat and I've been a-painting an' ballas'in' of her."

"He's too old," said Mrs. Skipper, a still deeper gloom enshadowing her countenance as she shook her head.

"Old 'r young, I know how ter manage a boat, an' I couldn't stan' it no longer,—a man 't 's been the dog I've been on the water! I've got my trawl geared up with a thousand hooks, an' I'm goin' ter bait 'em next Monday an' make out through the Gut ag'in."

"It's in his blood, an' nothin' 'll rest him of it tell he heaves up his las' sigh. His father an' his gran'father was skippers afore him. Wal', ef that's the way he is to go, why, so it must be."

"Do ye know o' any other way to git to the fishin' grounds?" inquired the old skipper of his wife, in all simplicity, lifting eyes of skyey candor from a weather-beaten countenance.

"I meant something else," she said significantly and solemnly. "Ye know I wouldn't feel so bad about it ef ye'd only been dipped."

"Good Tunket—wife. First ye're afeard I'll git drowned, an' then ye want me dipped. Le's take the water's it comes. F'r my part I think it's 'hullsomer ter be salt, an' enough of it," cried the innocent old sea-dog buoyantly. "Let alone o' the mux in that ol' Baptis' tank, Mother, an' le's take the water whatever way God A'mighty's mind ter send it."

Rob gave his helpless giggle.

Mrs. Skipper's sad face broke up a little, indulgently. "Wal', anyways," she said, "I believe 't Grace 'll save him, somehow. It saves ter the utterm'st, an' I believe it 'll retch down an' git a-holt o' Skipper, somehow." It was plain that she had no intention of putting out on any sea, celestial or terrestrial, without her Skipper.

"Sure!" responded that scion of perdition kindly; "don't ye fret no more about it, Mother. Ain't ye goin' ter treat Rob to some buttermilk?"

Rob was still a famous drinker, according to his new lights. Spring water, milk, buttermilk, all was fish that came to his net; and the depth of the draught was mainly determined by the copiousness of the source of supply.

"My sakes, it's a pleasure to see ye guzzle," beamed Mrs. Skipper, looking up as at the splendid throat of an ox while Rob drained the pitcher of buttermilk. "Come into the garding," she continued, giving out gratefully to the utmost of her hospitality, "le's see what we can do for ye there. Laylocks is purty, but they're kind o' common; they ain't like garding-raised flowers."

"Fix him up purty, Mother," Skipper called after them without stint or jealousy. Mrs. Skipper stood

in the tall grass in her flower garden; many of the flowers were hidden by the grass, but some tall "delilahs" and "pineys" held their own. She plucked several of the grandest specimens for Rob, who had the great good sense to know that the little old woman was, herself, the sweetest flower standing there.

But he had another heart's love farther on; and so, with a tender adieu to Mrs. Skipper, his hands embarrassed with a riches of laylocks, pineys, and delilahs, he tramped on his picturesque way.

And now at his approach looked up gladly little Rhody Ditmarse, eight years old, and plain as sorrow, with a temporary absence of front teeth, and an old-world gravity of care resting on her small snubbed face.

She sat on the Ditmarse doorstep, barefoot, her brown briar-scratched but sturdy legs plainly adapted for that toilsome and trial-beset path in life which they in all probability were destined to run.

"Hello, Rob," she cried, and the grin she gave him through her exposed gums declared openly as day that her heart was in his keeping.

"Hello, Rhody," replied Rob, with reciprocal affection. "I see you've got the cows home and the work all done up."

She nodded sagely. "Red Suke's gittin' to be a breecher," she said. Rob knew that this meant a cow that jumped and broke fences, and he received the news with sympathy. "But Father says he's goin' ter rig up a poke on her ter-morrer 't 'll fix her so she won't jump no more fences."

Rob was sitting on the doorstep at Rhody's side by

this time, and the little girl put up her hand and whispered confidentially:

"Mother an' Father 's a-havin' words inside thar'." The sound of voices in the kitchen indicated that they were not only having words, but loud ones.

"Mother says Grammer's goin' ter come here ter live, an' Father says she ain't neither—but Mother can beat Father ev'ry time," sighed little Rhody contentedly; "an' Grammer c'n come, I guess, pore, lonesome, ol' crittur." Rhody's tone was such a faithful reproduction of the whine of some charitable elder, and her face was that of so confirmed a bearer of life's burdens, Rob actually felt a sense of edification in her presence.

"She c'n come, pore, lonesome, ol' crittur—an' she c'n have my plate with the red mountings an' blue catarack painted onto it."

"It must be a beautiful plate," said Rob.

"Grammer giv' it to me when I was borned, an' it's only fa'r she sh'd have it back ag'in. Ef God 'll give me vittles," continued Rhody, evidently quoting from the paternal wisdom in this instance, "ef God 'll give me vittles, I don't care what kind o' a tub I snout 'em out of."

"My heavens, Rhody," gasped Rob, "how you do remember sayings for a young one."

"What ye goin' ter do with yer pineys an' delilahs?" observed Rhody, eying those splendid blooms with the moderate spirit of one who can admire without coveting.

"I'm going to give some to you," said Rob, at once holding out a pair to her, "and half of my lilacs."

"Ye'd better keep yer laylocks ef ye favor 'em,"

said Rhody, showing a disposition to accept only the rarer bloom; "they're common as sheep-weed 'round here. Bet ye," she suddenly challenged him, with a grin, for the dome of her thought was Shakespearean and embraced romping joy, as well as stern deliberation and bravely sustained sorrow; "bet ye a candy suckker I c'n tech Pompey Rock afore you kin."

The young man and the little girl sprang to their feet and ran like victims of spasmodic insanity pursued by the furies, down the bluffs, over fences, down steeper bluffs, scampering out to where the tide had left Pompey's Rock as the solemn and tremendous goal of their endeavors.

Of course Rhody touched it first, Rob looked out for that, and made a great show of panting forth his humiliation and defeat.

"Tuckered?" grinned the little girl. "I ain't tuckered a mite. Wal'," she sighed thoughtfully, "I had my spree, an' now I must go beatin' in to'ds home or they'll be settin' up a pelly-loo for me."

"What is that?" said Rob, as a humble inquirer and unashamed, for Rhody ever imparted her wisdom generously, with no hint of scorn for the unenlightened.

"A pelly-loo is a screech, or a yawlin', or a bawlin', ary one," said she.

Rob pressed the penny for a candy sucker into her hand. "You won the bet, Rhody."

"Ye needn't ter pay it, Rob. Bettin' is only jest f'r fun. Ef you'd a-tetched Pompey's 'fore I did, I couldn't a paid ye, for I didn't hev no penny." She handed it back, but Rob looked hurt and shook his head.

"Ef I keep it," continued Rhody, closing a very hard, red little fist over it, "it won't go for no suckker: it' ll go to'ds gittin' me a meetin' hat."

"What! no suckker after all?"

"No; I'd ruther have one, Rob—but Mother told Father I'd git damd like the heathin ef I didn't hev no meetin' hat purty soon. She said I'd never heern tell o' sech a thing as a Lord's Supper."

"Well, I don't know—I don't want to dispute your mother, and I don't know much about it," said Rob reflectively; "but, somehow, I should think, you're so generous, and work so hard for your folks, and such a little girl, too, and giving your grandmother your own plate with the mountains and the cataract, and all; and there's a kind of a spirit about you, Rhody—I can't explain—but I, honest, believe if God had a supper table he'd want you to sit right near to him at it, honest, I do."

"Ye'd ought ter know," said Rhody meditatively, "f'r ye come from New Yar-r-rk. But I wouldn't care where I set to the supper, Rob," she added, with entire conscientiousness, "so long as I set alongside o' you."

"Same here," replied Rob, really deeply interested in the subject, and with a gravity as thoughtful as Rhody's own.

"S'posin' ye should spy me out in hell?" continued the fearless Rhody, whose mental range, as has been said, was Shakespearean, and who stuck at no finical barriers of ultra polite English, "s'posin' ye' sh'd spy me out in hell, Rob, what'd ye do?"

"Well, I guess you know very well, Rhody, I'd work day and night to get you out."

"Yes," said Rhody faithfully, "I bet ye would."

"And what," said Rob, following Rhody's trail along these novel theological altitudes, "what if you were in the other place and I was in hell—for, sharp though they are in New York, they might get there, you know—what would you do?"

"Wal', ef my own wings was growed," said Rhody, her plain blue eyes fairly ecstatic with this untrammelled flight of her imagination, "I'd dive straight down an' git ye myself. But, ef I'm settin' 'round thar' moultin', I'd make sech a pelly-loo that them full-growed angels wouldn't git no peace tell they dove down an' hove ye up onto their wings an' fetched ye up safet and sound. I'd raise 'Snakes an' Tophit'," said the excited Rhody, again choosing a gem from the paternal language, "tell they started ter go down an' fetch ye, Rob."

Thus mutually secure in the dark mazes of the here and the hereafter, the comrades parted, Rhody making homeward, and Rob continuing his path along the beach; for even yet the sun had not reached its setting.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE AUCTION

APPROACHING the River settlement, Rob heard and saw an auction in progress, and he hastened on, congratulating himself that he had stumbled, perchance, on a new scene of activity. Never since his arrival in the country had he beheld so heartily numerous a company gathered together.

Captain Belcher as auctioneer was unwearied.

"How much for Daisy Lee comin' yander, with all his bokays throwed in," he declaimed, low, Rob not yet within hearing. So Rob dawned good-naturedly upon the laughing company, unaware that he was the fresh cause of their mirth. But the fist that clasped Mrs. Skipper's lilacs had now a well-earned reputation for prowess, and Captain Belcher, with discreetly veiled sarcasm, lifted his hat as Rob leaned on the fence in close proximity to the scene.

"Mr. Hilton, ladies and gents, ef the little birds carries their tales true, is not allus goin' to be a married bachelder, but is goin' to stock up a home. He has arrove jest in time ter bid off this beautiful lemon squeezer. Now honeymoons is sweet—but some sweet, some sour, that's the way ter mix it; an' anybody calkerlatin' on a honeymoon wants just sech a lemon squeezer as this right handy. Start 'er up, somebody. What 'm I bid? Look a-here—ain't ye ever had yer girl mix ye up a glarss o' lemonade some hot July

evenin', an' swallered down ten to a dozen seeds along 'ith what flies an' June-bugs the' was huvverin' 'round? I have. Great Tamarack, ef swallerin' lemon seeds an' sech truck perduces 'penderceters the wonder is I ain't been toted back ter the States long ergo ter be operated on an' into my marble tomb. But here ye have it. No danger, this 'ere lemon squeezer is its own seed-retainer, simplerfied magic 'namel screw, Ederson patent, never-rust, geared-up, all-endurin'—good Lord, ain't nobody here calkerlatin' on a honeymoon? Start 'er up. What 'm I offered?"

"Five cents," declared an angry and aggressive voice. Rob glanced in the direction whence proceeded that familiar snarl and saw Bate, standing at Cuby's side; and Cuby's eyes flamed wrath at Rob. So, thought Rob, Bate had told Cuby that he (Rob) had attacked him for the brotherly admonition he had found it necessary to give his sister Mary—that would be Bate's way of explaining it; and Cuby's soul was consumed with jealousy and hate.

The smile that had been beaming broadly on Rob's face left it, and a look of bewilderment and sick disgust took its place. But he strode manfully down to Cuby's side, nearer the auction tables, whose motley contents were revealed to the open air and the wondering crowd.

"Shall I bid for it, Cuby?" he said, lifting his hat to her and conquering himself to smile as one who was glad to be near her and proud to own her. "I will bid for it, too. Ten cents," he shouted.

"Fifteen," cried Bate malignantly.

"Twenty," again shouted Rob, and Cuby's unsof-

tened eyes yet gleamed with satisfaction. She was asserting in public view her power as enchantress and fostering a quarrel between two apparent suitors for her charms, and her head was held high.

"Twenty-five," screamed Bate, whose voice in passion took on the nature of some devouring bird of the air.

"Thirty," Rob's tones grew more clear and boyish by reason of the stress of warfare.

"Thirty-five," came the answering scream.

At "Fifty" Rob paused and said reasonably, aloud, "Say, we can get a fine new one for less than that, Cuby. What's the use in being silly? Let Bate have the old thing if he wants it."

A merry cheer went up, and it was for Rob and the plain dictates of common sense.

But Cuby saw it otherwise. Bate, for private rancor, would have bid to the end of time: possessing nothing, he would at least have maintained the attitude of a squanderer, as quenchless in his determination as in his hate. She saw it in the light of her own personal triumph and defense, which Rob flatly refused in the sight of all men to continue further, as though the game were not worth the candle.

She stamped her foot. "You are a miser and a cow-ar-r-rd," she cried. "I want not your company with me. Go you to them w'at likes makin' company with a fool."

Rob, whiter than chalk, again lifted his hat to her, and with dignity:

"No *man* calls me a coward, Cuby. Perhaps you'll think better of it when you are not so angry." He

joined the group by the fence again. Public sentiment was on his side, to his wonder; and by chance, as it seemed to him, for he was no diplomatist.

Meanwhile, Captain Belcher stood with uplifted lemon squeezer and open mouth expressive of absorbing interest. As the public eye reverted to him once more he rose equal to the occasion.

“Turns with a crank, crank, crank,” he exclaimed jubilantly, waving the lemon squeezer high in air. “I been inspectin’ of ’er, and I find she turns with a crank. Duplex cushion springs. Wireless triple screw. Mac-carony system—she ain’t no old side-wheeler, this lemon squeezer ain’t. Ah now, if it was only a girl-squeezer.”

Roars of merriment applauded his wit and drowned his puissant voice, reverberating from the bluffs and the region beyond and far down the River road; here in the River settlement itself joy shrieked aloud and spent itself in an ecstasy of uncontrollable mirth, while on the other hand the far-sounding beaches stretched away in solemn wonder. Belcher himself was solemn; that his wit was keen he realized, but such excess of laughter recalled him with an imperturbable gravity to the business in hand.

“Do I hear another bid?” he asked. “Be you all done on the lemon squeezer? Goin’, goin’, an’ gone—at fifty cents—to Bate Stingaree.”

A subdued howl now of derisive laughter, greeted Bate. Angry was he beyond all utterance. “Come, Cuby,” he muttered, “let’s leave this gang o’ cackling idjits.” Angry past utterance was Cuby. There was but one scornful and revengeful thing left for her to

do, and that was to go away with Bate, and she turned by this method to flaunt her contempt in the eyes of the company. Rob was now in the position of a man despised and insulted openly, and pitying looks fell upon him. Life was too intricate for Rob, so low-fallen, to study the matter out; only, so far as he knew, he meant to play the man.

"Don't go away with him, Cuby," he said, catching up with her; "people won't think fair of you if you do this; they'll think ill of you, and you do not deserve it."

"Go mind you your own bus-i-ness," she replied passionately; "you—you poor half-a-fool laylock thi'f."

"Great heavens, Cuby, Mrs. Skipper gave me the lilacs, and I've brought them to you. Won't you take them?" He held them out earnestly. Cuby, with a quick disdainful flash of her hand, dashed them to earth.

"Take them to Ma'y Sting'ree," she cried, "w'at make a laugh at you. Or that seelly one that they call 'Car'line,' or ol' Mis' Skippaire, or dar-r-rtty little Rhode, w'at goes call the cows home bare-laiggitt. Go you to them with your ol' steenkin' flowers—go."

She left him blighted. For his wits were slow, sure enough: they were mighty good wits, but they were slow. But Mrs. Skipper's lilacs—he could not leave those in the dust. He gathered them up.

"Say, but ain't he fond o' flowers, though," commented a voice from the audience; "ain't he kind o' sof', though, f'r sech a thunderin' big, squar'-shouldered buck."

With smarting cheeks, and still holding the lilacs, Rob returned to his post of observation at the auction. For some moments his cheeks burned and his eyes were downcast. Then, two baby girls of his discursive acquaintance among the hills, let loose by their compassionate mother, toddled over to him and grasped the calves of his legs. He stooped and picked them up, one on each arm, where they sat loftily perched with a visible contempt for all past weary and fretful tugging at their mother's skirts.

"The kind creetur', the' ain't no harm to him, I don't believe," whispered one woman to her neighbor, "standin' thar' as patient as a ox lashed to a plow with his arms full o' babies an' laylocks."

With the accession of the babies, who seemed to have come indirectly to alleviate and share his ruth and confusion, Rob quite lost his abashed self-consciousness, and began to experience renewed interest in the lively proceedings of the auctioneer.

"What we got here?" queried Belcher, in his tones of cheerful thunder. "Pair o' han'some, han'painted, half-tint, full-tone, storm rubbers. Waltham movement, wheelbarrow action, warranted not ter run down at the toe—new when they was first made. Start 'em up, somebody. Infermation from the weather bureau states 't the sun is goin' ter set to-night, same as usual, no pos'ponement on account o' this auction. Wake up, you folks thar', or the foolish virgins 'll git their ilecans filled an' ketch ye nappin'. Now look here, what 'm I bid? No lampblack an' sugar in *them* rubbers—them's straight gum—the kind mother use' ter wear—what me an' little brother use' ter take holt, me

at the toe an' him at the heel, an' stretch clean acrost the kitchen floor—but when one cend let go, then look out! Holes in 'em? Sure. A hole in each one to put yer foot into. Pass 'em 'round an' see if ye can find any more.

“Whilst the rubbers is goin' 'round what 'm I bid on this beautiful asbestos pad?”

“'Tain't a pad,” interposed a scornful feminine voice; “it's a tea-stand.”

“S-s-sh,” pleaded the powerful Belcher; “she's a-goin' as a pad. Five cent—six cent—and knocked down to Sammy Pine—at six cent—as a pad. You'll be all right next winter, Sammy; the' won't no wind peel through *you*.”

“Hurry up with them rubbers. Mis' Bowles wants time to borry Mis' Henfry's glasses an' take a look? All right, then. What we got here? Spat for turnin' griddlecakes an' spankin' the young ones, turn an' turn about. What 'm I bid? One cent—two cent—two cent—an' gone to Ephri'm Horn at two cent. Good f'r you, Ephri'm. Ye get squeezed dry on yer taxes every year, thirty cent for yer poll an' thirty-three cent f'r yer 'sessment an' prop'ty tax; but, by Gum, ye got a cheap griddle spat ter make up for it. Now all ye want is a good-sized mess o' young ones ter spank, Ephri'm, elset that spat 'll be layin' idle half the time.

“What ye doin' with them rubbers? Mis' Bowles is inspectin' of 'em?—wal', all right. Now, look a-here. Jest lift yer eyes to this interestin' fine-tooth comb. This 'ere comb's got a history ef we was a mind ter look into it, an' spite o' the years she's seen an' 'er

many wanderin's, she's jist as keen as ever—this old comb is—for followin' and pursuin'—whatever ought ter be pursued. Why, she'd make tracks anywhar's, straight hair or curly, Chineese, Japanee, Squ-gee, or Feejee. Mister Hilton, drop them infant cherribs an' yer bokays a minute, an' step down here, please, an' show 'em what this 'ere heirloom, sooveneer, Philadelph' centennial, fine-tooth comb can do to'ds surveyin' a road through them extry-ply, three-strand, warranted five hundred yards to a spool, silk-wove, cotton-back, plush-finish, goldin' locks o' yourn."

The multitude laughed, and Rob laughed gayest of all. (It was a long time since Rob had been at a theater.) The little girls mounted on his shoulders laughed and crowed in sympathy.

"Challange not accepted," shouted Belcher victoriously. "Merits o' the article proved. What 'm I bid? One cent—one cent—one cent—an' gone to Ephri'm Horn—at one cent. All right, Ephri'm, only don't lose sight o' yer taxes whilst ye're layin' in this 'ere charmin' mess o' curios. Duty first, Ephri'm, an' dude afterwards.

"Heave them rubbers over here. Split in the sides? They done it laughin' then. Who wants a happy, cheerful, tickle-ye-ribs, consolin' pair o' rubbers 't have split their sides a-laughin'? Joy for the wounded sperrit, sunshine f'r rainy days, hope when the flour-barrel's low, faith when the sink-spout's clogged, peace when the pig gets ketched in the fence—what 'm I bid? What? What? Ye don't want 'em, eh? Ye want ter go 'round low-sperrited with a mug on ye like a kite too heavy geared ter wobble up off the 'arth, eh?

No bid at all f'r these 'ere smilin', beckonin', welcome-all, weddin' bell peal, orange peel, cherry pie, cream tart, layer-cake rubbers, ch? 'T's enough ter make a man weep, ef he didn't have these rubbers right afore him splittin' their sides a-laughin'; I'll keep these 'ere consolers right afore me f'r the present whilst I rummage around here an' find somethin' fit ter put up for sech a raft o' owls as you be to bid on.

"Here ye are. Jest what ye're achin' for. Here's somethin' next thing to a caskit—here's a enlarged photograph all framed in pine-needles o' old Sol Sloper himself, gran'father, as ye all know, to the man what's havin' this auction. Look at them featur's, will ye? Ef ye want ter fill yer house with melancholly here's somethin' 't 'll stock ye up, parlor, settin'-room, anty-room, kitchen, attic, cellar, hen-coop, an' enough left to go under the bed. He screwed a lot o' money out er poor folks in his day, old Sol did, an' that 'ar mouth o' his'n 'll put ye in mind o' the stummickache an' the hole in yer pocket every time ye look at it. An' as f'r that 'ar nose o' his'n——"

"Belay thar'," cried a voice.

"What's up, Sol?" said the auctioneer firmly.

"Lay that picter aside. 'T got inter the mess by mistake."

"Same old tricks," sighed Belcher reminiscently; "old Sol was allas pokin' his nose in whar' there was a penny ter be made. But I'll lay him to one side. It's my rewl to speak well o' them that's passed on, however pizen-mean they was; an' 'tain't reelly the respec'ful caper ter auction off yer fam'ly art gall'ry, Sol, though I don't wonder at yer not wantin' ter take that ol' life-



"WHO WANTS A HAPPY, CHEERFUL, TICKLE-YER-RIBS,
CONSOLIN' PAIR 'O RUBBERS?"

size presentment o' misery an' gloom along with ye on the boat; no knowin' when ye might strike bottom——"

"It got in thar' by mistake, I say. Hustle up with yer business, Belcher. I hired ye to auction off, not ter stand thar' an' parley-voo."

"Now, Sol, ef it hadn't been f'r my parley-voo, keepin' folks good-natered an' blindin' of 'em to the wuthlessness o' the goods, you'd 'a' had the durndest mess o' ruck here ter load up an' pitch over into the dump; an' my conscience, 'stead o' bein' heavy an' deceitful, 'd 'a' been as light-hearted as these ol' gigglin' rubbers——"

"Say, you go ahead with yer work ef you want yer pay."

"Correct. The sun has laid her pink-ruffled, rosy-fluted nightcap onto the piller o' rest all ready to put on the minute she's set the buckwheat cakes to raise, an' the codfish 'to soak, an' wound the clock, an' turned in. Pigs is squealin' from the pen, cows is mooin' from the pastur'. Hand me over that thar' bedquilt; let's heave the rest o' this tangled, loonatic-asylum, crow's nest lot o' truck into 'er, an' call it a mess. Here we be—a whole quilt full. What 'm I bid? Sight unseen—treasures o' the mine, gems o' the ocean, products o' man's inventive natur' the world over—swell-bodied pickle dish, Aunt Lucindy's hymn book, crock o' tallow fat, tin lantern with one hinge on, fact'ry-turned butter print representin' five mice an' a dung-shovel, cullender f'r strainin' squash with the bottom right handy to it all ready to be soddered in, harf a spoonholder patterned arfter the tower o'

Babble, lots o' little pieces o' ch'ice imported East Chelsy china jest fit to milk the ducks into—all here—an' I ain't begun ter name 'em. Start 'er up, somebody. What 'm I bid? Seven cent—ten cent—my kingdom come, you folks want the 'arth for nothin'?

“Jest let me show ye—take this 'ere quilt full, an' tie 'er up, so-fashion, an' when ye git 'er home, nail 'er up to the beam, an' stan' off an' strike 'er with a mawlet, an' she'll make a rattle that 'ud stop the yop of a whole houseful o' bawlin' babies an' put 'em ter sleep in no time. What 'm I bid for this 'ere 'riginal, long-pendulum, gigantical, cyclone-avalanche, dynamite, thunder an' lightnin', Niagry baby-rattler? Twelve cent—thirteen cent—fifteen cent—fifteen—fifteen—an' gone—to Mis' Homer Millet—at fifteen cent. An' well done, say I. Now then, meetin's broke up. Thank ye for yer kind attention. Farewell. Adew—an' all the rest o' the s'ciety trimmin's.”

But the excitement was not yet over. For Dose Ellery's horse, exasperated by his long and tedious anchorage to a fence post, at the first loosening of the hitchline had backed into the adjacent barn and smashed the tail-board of the wagon and with it the rickety incubator which Dose had bid off early in the afternoon as a mysterious prize which was to sprinkle his dooryard with early chickens.

“Never mind, Dose,” said Captain Belcher unofficially, on his way from the auction ground. “It's money in yer pocket ter git shet o' the thing. Now look here,” he lifted a row of mathematical fingers. “Ye paid twenty-five cents f'r that ol' fool-wrack o' an artificial breeder, didn't ye? An' ye'd a rot-roasted

about fifteen dozen o' eggs in 'er 'fore ye'd a give 'er up as a bad job an' kicked 'er to the sunny side o' Jericho. Eggs at this present minute is ten cents a dozen. Reckon on 'er up, an' ye're a dollar an' a quarter to the good, Dose; say nothin' o' the bad langwidge pilin' up ag'in ye in the ledger what's so full now 't the leds to the cover won't hardly stay shet. You take that dollar an' a quarter and git some oats f'r the old hoss what's been savin' ye good money."

"You can talk, Belcher," said the sorrowful Dose; "twan't your money nor your incubator."

"I wouldn't set up any pelly-loo over it, Dose," said the woman with the quiltful of treasures, and she paused so that their rattling might not obstruct the wisdom and condolence of her speech. "The A'mighty has writ it down an' set it goin', that the' 's nothin' like a old hen to raise chickens; an' when you go ag'in natur' you've got your hands full—you've got 'em *too* full."

"I know that the A'mighty set it goin' that the' 's nothin' like a old hen ter raise chickens, but I never heered afore that He writ it down," said Belcher.

"Well, He did so," said the woman of the quilt; and she was one of the sort that could face out Belcher or any other mortal.

"Whar' abouts?"

"In the Bible, Stu Belcher. That's whar'."

"I seen it thar' myself," said a meek little woman, who was the quilt-woman's next door neighbor and had acquired a wise habit of courting her good-will perennially and conciliating her on all occasions.

"What part o' the Bible?" persisted the foolhardy and thunderous Belcher.

"You open the leds o' yourn, ef you've got one, an' read tell you come to it," said the quilt-woman; "an' you'll see some more things there that you never heern tell on afore, Stu Belcher."

She went rattling down the road, the meek woman maintaining a gait of stout partisanship at her side.

"That's a cute gal," said Belcher, pointing his finger after her, to Rob, who, dispossessed of the babies but with his lilacs still in hand, approached at this moment; "a cute old gal. My mother an' father kind o' wanted me ter make up to 'er when we was young folks together, but I kind o' ducked my flyin'-jib an' wriggled out o' the channel an' laid by in the cove till the danger was over, an' she got spliced onto somebody else."

Captain Belcher, being in a meditative mood, regarded Rob and his wilted lilacs with unusual pensiveness and interest.

"This gittin' spliced is a resky business, Rob. Ye seem to think a good deal o' yer flowers. Old Mis' Skipper giv' 'em to ye?"

"Yes."

"She's of the natur' of laylocks herself; so's Mis' Belcher, my woman; but that old gal heavin' out o' sight over yander, she 's more like them other flowers ye're holdin'."

"The delilahs and pineys?"

"Aye; though I suppose the proper way ter pronounce 'em is dallyers and pe-o-nys; all the same, they're a flauntin' high-steppin' sassy kind o' flower.

Cuby, now—Cuby Tee-boo—she's a good deal on the dallyer an' pe-o-ny line."

Rob's face was fine and sad; his stalwart physical development at Power Lot, God Help Us, had edified Captain Belcher beyond measure; it was a winsome face, too, and Captain Belcher spoke again.

"Perhaps—I ain't saying nothin'," he continued guardedly; "but I'm goin' to look inter some matters o' law a leetle, an' ef it don't make none o' the inner-cent folks 'round here liable, and ef Cuby kind o' huffs ye off an' gives ye the cold shoulder, way she done ter-day—mebby it c'n be proved 't that old loafin' demmy-rip of a jestice o' the peace what was asked ter jine you two warn't in no condition for the job, in which case you could each go yer own way hawk-free an' freedom-wild. I ain't promisin' nothin', but I'm mixin' up my tar with an eye to seein' what c'n be done. F'r I like ye, Rob. Ye ain't no nincompoop sech as I thought ye might be when ye first hove in sight; ye're as honest an' stanch a young craft as I ever hailed, an' d—d ef I wouldn't like ter see ye free ter selec' somethin' tasty in the line of a laylock f'r a partner, f'r I reckon ye kind o' favor 'em, same as I do."

Rob smiled as he took the captain's friendly outstretched hand, although he made no confidences of his own. He pursued his solitary way up the Steeps in a leisurely manner, often pausing, having no incentive for hastening to any waiting heart the world over, and night having settled down on the potato patch and every other field of labor. He saw Mrs. Byjo piloting her boarder home from the evening they had spent with Mary. He reached the Stingaree house

and stood by the dim door, his heart as peaceful within him as it was sad and without hope.

Then he knocked and entered. The light, though only of a feeble oil lamp, appeared to dazzle him. He stood silent as if dropped from the interlunar spaces, his wilted lilacs clasped in his hand.

Mary had just seated herself by the table to mend some garments of Bate's; she looked up as Rob entered with the habitual quick alarm of one who had learned to dread the return of her family from the fleshpots of the River; there was a questioning sorrow too in her wide, dark eyes. It stung Rob, but now only to a great compassion for *her*.

"Oh, you must not worry about me," he said earnestly, simply. "I have not touched a drop. I had not even thought of such a possibility until I—saw your look. How we have tried you—oh, my God. But I do not crave it any more, I do not want it. Miss Stingaree, can't you trust me? You must not worry any more."

Mary looked into his clear eyes, heard his steady, impassioned speech, saw above all his thin, kind, weary face bending over her. A compunction seized her that was like the surging of many waters in her soul. She—Mary Stingaree—wanted in that moment even to put her arm 'round the poor fellow's neck and tell him that she was glad he had come home—to see the great light that would waken on his patient, quiet face—he, who was made for joy.

She only smiled; and Rob only thought her beautiful and that her smile seemed to answer him; he dreamed of nothing more.

"Your flowers," she murmured, "are rather dejected. Shall we put them in some water?"

"I carried them all through the auction," said Rob. "Mrs. Skipper gave them to me, and somehow, you know, I couldn't bear to throw them away."

Mary brought a vase of water and arranged them. "She gave you some of the very choicest from her garden, too," she mused, setting them off to advantage, with deft touches of her fingers; "she must be—very fond of you."

"No more fond than I am of her." Rob smiled back sweetly, and struggled politely and desperately to repress a yawn, for he had been so long wandering in the bright air, and the wind that makes sleep had risen wild with the clouds at sunset.

Mary bit her lip, and Rob concluded that she was in some way amused at his stupidity. He did not mind. The stars were not for him; if he furnished them amusement, so much the better. It must be weary to be stuck up on high always in such brilliancy and aloofness. He took his own small lamp from the shelf and lit it.

"I'm so dead-sleepy, if you'll excuse me," he said, "I think I'll turn in. Good-night, Miss Stingaree. Pleasant dreams."

"Good-night, Rob," said Mary, resuming her sordid mending under the fragrance of the beloved Mrs. Skipper's flowers.

Rob had long since ceased to pass any censures on his mattress; it was the best constructed and most comfortable mattress in the world. He lay down upon it with the events of the day, good, bad, and indifferent,

all tending to lull him, and a comparatively insignificant item forming the hazy nucleus of his sinking-off.

Dose Ellery's battered incubator—Rob seemed still to follow it without effort of his own, along the winding road till it merged into the quilt-woman's presence, and her voice was distinct, though far away—"and writ it down, that the' 's nothin' like a old hen to raise chickens."

Ah, she was right, Rob had it now, without effort, from the black-velvet days, the long curls, and the nurse taking him to Sunday School. "Even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." There was old Speckled-Top, for instance—Rob had watched her recently—a faithful and much-enduring parent, clucking with thrilling anxiety while the whole brood beat in under her patient feathers; even the sad of the flock, the rickety one, the lame one, and, most lamentable of all, the weak, gay, smart one who tottered off alone with ridiculous airs and flourishes, gazing ever with the same idiotic complacency into the maw of destruction; but coming back, like the rest; like the rest, all creeping in under the big hushed wings at night time.

CHAPTER XIX

JACOB TRAWLES BREAKS AWAY

THE bleak spaces, the heights and depths, that had been to Rob as an enemy when he first gazed upon them, were now the strange unspoken solace of his soul. Everywhere he turned God smote him in the face—not with fear, but with that greatness which absorbed his petty griefs and challenged him from his place in the arena to fight the fight out and, in all simplicity, to make a man of himself before he died.

The first and hardest task was to arrange for Cuby's home on the hills.

"You are not even so smar-r-rt as I thought you was, Rober'," she demurred; "you been loafin' 'roun' Ma'y Sting'ree ontill you are dees'greeable an' solemn lak a owl lak she is."

"If I thought I was like *her*——"

"Why don't you go to marry her then? Or has the ol' doc-tór made loaf to her? Me—I let you have her—willin'."

"Thank you, Cuby, but I'm married to you, I believe, and I'm going to stand by it. A Hilton knows how to support his wife, and how to treat her, too. You need not be afraid. I've earned money besides my board, working out, and my potato crop is as fine as anybody's. I'm going over with Jim to Waldeck before long to sell them."

"Mind you this what I tell you: I shall not go to stan' any preachin' from you nor Ma'y Sting'ree. Me—I boss-a my own house."

"And welcome, Cuby."

"An' I lak not to live 'roun' with anybody with so long a owl face on them, neither."

"I do not blame you," said Rob, smiling. "But honestly, I laugh more up there on the hills. The River, down here takes me down, somehow. I've got so used to living up there, I suppose—and I'm laughing half the time, Cuby. It's *in* me. I couldn't help it if I tried."

Cuby appeared neither flattered nor pleased by this promising confession.

"I would rather—me—to live down here," she said; "it is not so stupeed daid an' alive. But I s'pose I must to go where it laks you to live."

"Yes," said Rob quietly, "that you must do."

In spite of Cuby's reluctant and much-qualified wifely admission, Rob had a thought that she in some degree, with her father and Bate as principals, were in some league of unappeasable resentment toward him, that they were gulling him on, as their phrase was; that they would even willingly work harm to him if they could do so unapprehended.

Nevertheless he believed, too, that when he brought Cuby to the hills and set up his forlorn home there, like the other forlorn homes at Power Lot, God Help Us, his domestic affairs would run on as smoothly as familiar toil and drudgery could make them. Cuby was a strikingly pretty and attractive girl, and she had a right, he reasoned, to hold a grudge against him, who

had compromised her by his promises and attentions and who now approached the realization of the marriage-tie so half-heartedly.

Would Caroline Treat marry old man Trawles and rent her house to Rob? It was the general opinion that she would do so, though—endowed as she was with the very genius of circumlocution—she had never yet committed herself. The pellucid river of her tongue continued its diversions in pleasant fields of sentiment and all manner of phraseology without that definite trend for which all, and especially Rob with a heavy duty on his heart, waited.

“Ya-as, oh, ya-as, doctors has their place in the world, an’ I don’t hold with them that says they despise the trade. I don’t consider, as some do, that doctors has nothin’ to do but set down in a fat butter-tub—as the old sayin’ is—and make up their charges ag’in ye. I consider ’t them that talks so-fashion has mighty little brains in their heads.”

This defense of his profession took place on the porchsteps of Mrs. Byjo’s house, when Doctor Margate had risen and urged Caroline to take his chair and she had declined on the ground that “the’ ’s nothin’ rests a body when they’re goin’ ’round neighborly like settin’ down betweenwhiles on somebody’s doorstep an’ sprawlin’ out sech o’ yer j’int’s an’ hinges as needs favorin’, as ye can’t do in a chair.”

The doctor acknowledged by a grave bow the propriety of her statement; he was delighted that she was there, and that the fact of his being visible on the porch had not deterred her from making this also an objective point in her neighborly dispositions and travels. If

she was making a set at him, as the continued wearing of the black kid gloves seemed to indicate, he believed that it was more from a harmless feminine fancy for making another conquest than from any designs upon him or any serious desire whatever to win him; and events proved that he was right.

"Oh my, ya-as, doctors has their place. How often the call comes in the middle o' the night, an' they haves to git up an' hunt 'round to tackle the hoss by lantern light, an' all the like o' that. The night my Dan'l was born was a reg'lar line-gale, an' every time the sea struck 'er she went under."

"It was a boat, and not a horse, that was going for the doctor this time, I presume, Mrs. Treet?" said Doctor Margate, whose skill in placing a lighthouse here and there along the unfettered ocean of Caroline's reminiscences had already won her heart.

"It was so—an' him that small you could put his face in a teacup, but growed up the biggest one I had, an' took no sass from anybody, from Owl's Head to Spry Bay, an' 'ud sail any old rotten tub they dars't him to."

"Your second son, I think you told me, Mrs. Treet?"

"Oh my, ya-as, an' got a place as mate on the old Noll Wimper when he wa'n't but seventeen, that was of a piece with all the rest, so 's one trip no further away than Thatcher's Breakwater they laid in harbor nine days stoppin' up the holes in 'er. The wind 's kind o' bafflin' to-day," added Mrs. Treet, taking off her soda-advertisement cap, which had been blown to one ear, and smoothing it with the black gloves, which had witnessed funerals and weddings, but seldom any

other social rite, so that Doctor Margate was forced to regard their recent donning in his behalf as a compliment almost sacrificial in its essence.

"When I think," he said, with a mental eye to her union with her faithful and desperate suitor, Jacob Trawles, "of all that you have borne and endured as a good wife and mother, Mrs. Treet, though I have only so recently been honored with your acquaintance and had the inestimable pleasure of conversing with you, yet even I wish most earnestly that you might find a safe haven of care and devotion at last in the affection of a good and worthy man."

Caroline Treet blushed, and that handsomely; and as it fell out, there was no harm whatever in her taking to herself the flattering conclusion that Doctor Margate was at this very moment proposing to her.

"Thar's some things, however, ter be said on the other side," she interposed as kindly as possible, "and thar's them nearer home that probably thinks they has the best rights." An inadvertent snigger was heard from Mrs. Byjo through the open doors to the kitchen. But Caroline Treet was never suspicious, and she continued:

"An' I never was one to throw away a good fowl from my own barnyard for a eagle on Moon Mountain—as the sayin' is—that might only turn an' claw me when I'd ketched him." It was the doctor's turn to blush now, and Mrs. Byjo was heard retreating precipitately to the woodshed. "No, oh no—not as makin' any likes between anybody and an eagle, for the' 's no sech likes atween 'em; but my ways has allus been here in Power Lot, God Help Us, and I ain't got the 'nclination

at my time o' life ter start up a drill with any strange sort o' folks that, like as not, in a week's time, I'd wish I hadn't made no sech a contrac'."

"Probably it would not be wise," murmured Doctor Margate.

"No more do I think folks needs ter be jest of an age, two an' two, for sech as that. An' ef Mary Sting'ree c'n make up her mind to ye, sence pore Rob Hilton's out er the runnin', as the sayin' is, it's my opinion she couldn't do no better, her havin' acquaintance with them ways that I don't know nothin' about, so's it ain't likely she'd go mewlin' an' squallin' around like a cat in a strange garret, which I'm very sure would overtake me—or worse."

The doctor's altruistic match-making speculations had been innocently hurled back at his own head.

"I thank you for your interest and encouragement, Mrs. Treet—if you mean me."

"No other is meant," replied Mrs. Treet, with almost tender compunction now that the danger to herself was passed. "I'm one that speaks right out what I got to say; my first meanin' is my last, an' no nuts hid away f'r winter in the bole o' the tree, as the sayin' is, but plain an' open."

"Let me congratulate you on your engagement to Mr. Trawles," said the doctor, trying bold tactics in return.

"Wal', I don't know," hesitated Caroline, with the dawn of prospective housekeeping for two gleaming nevertheless through the discreet composure on her comely face. "I'm one that allus rolls my buggy out er the shed 'fore I go down to the pastur' to ketch the

hoss, as the sayin' is. We don't make much o' 'engagements,' here, but as soon as the word is spoke the deed is done, an' a dollar to the Jestice, ef it c'n be scraped up, tho' he's a pore triffin' gump anyway, that never knows what o'clock it is, and had ought to be in better business."

"You don't consider him really competent to marry people?" said the wily doctor. "But he married Rob, I think, to Miss—Cuby Tee-bo?"

"Only Stu Belcher an' the All-Seein' knows who married them," replied Caroline. "I heered a whisper lately that 'twas Stu himself; but even so, joke or earnest, it's been gone an' done, an' no gittin' away from it."

"Surely, a marriage performed as a joke would not hold."

"I don't know how it is whar' you live," replied Caroline gravely, "but, here, it don't make no difference. It's a dreadful solemn yarn they reel off over ye, an' when it's gone through with, why, the job's done, no matter who, not even ef it was no better 'n old Tim Tibbits himself done it—thar' you be, an' not even the angel with the Book o' gold clasps could git ye out of it, or give ye a grain o' comfort but what ye'd got ter take the dose."

"This is dreadful to contemplate," said the doctor. "The very thought of the relentlessness of it chills me."

"You an' me's been through the drill once afore," said Caroline. "Stu Belcher's been through it, and it ain't likely, ef he done it, that even sech a clown as him done sech a piece o' work as that f'r a joke, he knows too well the meanin' of it; but anyways, havin'

done it, it wouldn't be a joke no longer, but thar' it would have ter stand."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I be."

It is strange, how, given a certain atmosphere, even the imaginings and superstitions of the simplest will cast a spell about a man. The expression of Caroline's face constituted with the gloves on her hands a symphony of decorous gloom. Doctor Margate, though knowing better, was afflicted for the moment with a sense of something uncanny, like the clanking of ghostly fetters, and moved restlessly in his chair to obtain a freer breath; when the situation was relieved by a scene, familiar to Power Lot, now portraying itself to the occupants of the porch though they themselves remained unseen.

Old man Trawles' tall form, in silk hat and broadcloth as usual, outlined a dignified progress toward that bourne of his heart's desire, the home of Caroline Treet. Almost simultaneously Nell and Gid approached, one on each side of him. A conversation of an obviously excited nature ensued, and the urbane form of the old man was led back to his own house, humiliated in bearing and baffled of purpose.

"Durn his old chicken-liver," exclaimed Caroline Treet impulsively, the light of action and a saving degree of affectionate ardor waking in her own eye; "why in dough-bat don't he stand up for himself?"

"Why, indeed," said the doctor, gladly echoing the living realities embodied in the sudden alertness of Mrs. Treet's tone.

"I'm a-goin' ter make for home," she declared, ris-

ing, "and when he sees me makin' my passage over, ef he's got any grit in 'im at all, he'll peel out o' thar', an' make the kind o' tracks he wants ter make, straight to'ds whar' he wants ter make 'em."

Doctor Margate watched with an interest which he would not have confessed even to himself, for the reappearance of Jacob Trawles. Within half an hour this took place, but was deflected by a course in the doctor's own direction.

"A baffling wind, sir, to-day," observed Jacob Trawles.

"Yes, sir," said the doctor promptly. "But we must not allow the wind to baffle us, sir. No."

"I'm makin' my far'well calls on my friends and neighbors, all 'round—my far'well calls. To-morrow's sun will probably see me in etarnity." The steady brown eyes of Jacob Trawles contemplated the doctor without either expression or reserve.

"Ah, my good friend, so you thought yesterday when you came to bid us farewell, but, thank heaven, you are still here with us. Why, man, you ought to be all alive with hope."

"Car'line is friendly with all but me. All but me can get nigh her. My hour has come, sir," persisted Jacob. "I have no desire to live. I am making my far'well calls. Nell an' Gid have gone down to the River," he remarked incidentally, though in the same tone and holding the doctor with the same unrelaxing eye.

"Well, we may as well be glad of that. I have just had a little conversation, by the way, with Mrs. Treet—a charming woman. I envy those who live

constantly in her vicinity, for it strikes me she is a woman of superior constancy. With her, the old friends would be the valued friends, the ones she held dearest."

"I would marry her to-morrow ef Car'line would speak the word; yes, ef she would speak the word. But women are bafflin'—bafflin' as the wind, sir."

"For some of us, that is true; but not for *you*, sir—not for you. Do not tell *her* that Nell and Gid have gone to the River," advised Doctor Margate clearly; "tell her that you broke away. Women adore boldness. They love it. Just say that you broke away."

Jacob surveyed the medical man, the dawn of a hitherto unrelated continent opening in his dun-brown eyes, and was speechless. At this juncture Nell and Gid advanced over the hill, having performed a sort of ruse to entrap their ancient in his amorous designs.

"Go right on and make your call"—the hearty voice of the doctor reassured him. "Mrs. Treet is looking out from her window yonder, and she will see for herself that, for her sake, you have broken away."

Jacob Trawles set out for Mrs. Treet's house at a gait unsurpassed in any recent events of his history, not excepting the time when Mrs. Byjo's prize steer gave him chase across the fields. Nell and Gid were a good half mile to the rear. The view was large at Power Lot. They came up, panting, crossing the doctor's bows, so to speak, just as Jacob stepped safe with a singularly valiant mien on to Mrs. Treet's doorstep—and further pursuit was hopeless.

Doctor Margate, seemingly engrossed in a book, glanced up pleasantly at the sound of Nell's insistent loud breathing and saw her fanning her pert, insolent

face with her hat, while Gid with affected ease of manner stood stuffing some newly whittled tobacco into the crater of his pipe. Nell was as worldly a girl as city or country ever bred. She had heard that the doctor was rich; and the delightful romance of elderly men stepping off the stage and leaving their fortunes to young wives was one of the most pleasing of her occasional literary diversions.

So she smirked at the distinguished gentleman without one saving gleam of bashfulness or timidity.

"A very breezy day," she simpered.

"Baffling—extremely so," replied the doctor, gallantly, and gave back his attention to the pages of his book.

A moment later, when no human travesty was imposed upon the greatness of the scene about him, he pondered why, since scenery and environment were said to have such a vital influence upon character, Power Lot should have produced Bate Stingaree, and Nell and Gid, and some others. But his heart turned to Mary Stingaree, and all nature rose in confirmation of its offspring; and even of poor Rob Hilton too, city-ruined, pleasure-spoiled—and so late adopted, yet whom the magnitude of the sea and the priestly glory of the hills—and love, perhaps, hopeless love of the sweet woman, for whom his own love too was hopeless—had awakened to infinite aspirations.

CHAPTER XX

SIDE-SADDLING THE LOG

OF the diplomacy of Captain Stu Belcher there had never been any doubt.

With a hail and a roar he brought his oxen up past Mrs. Byjo's, and when he discovered Doctor Margate taking a stroll farther down the road he drove his chariot of four wheels and a log in that direction with a mighty rattling and a swifter advance than usually appertains to such a vehicle.

"Git on, sir. Git on. Lemme give ye a lift. You're young enough ter side-saddle on a log, by Humfrey, an' will be f'r twenty years to come. Whoa, you goldurn wireless telegrafters, you," he bellowed at his oxen, who found it as difficult to stay their pace as it had been in the first place to acquire it. "Git right up—call it side-saddlin', tho' we ain't got no saddles! Jest the other side o' that knot, onless ye want ter put a skylight though yer trouse's. You ain't got nobody ter mend 'em for ye. I have, an' I done well, too, Doctor Margerit—I done d—n well."

"That's good," said the doctor, riding the log skillfully, and enjoying a most unaccountable elation therefore; it may have been the atmosphere, it may have been the world around him, but the cushions of his victoria and the padding of his electric cab, as his mind reverted to them, seemed base and discommodious in

comparison. "I'm glad you found a good mate. I hope you deserve her. And now look here, Captain Belcher, don't you let Robert Hilton bring Cuby Tee-bo up here on the hills and carry out that fake marriage to her. I expect you to look out for that, or there'll be sad consequences for you. Mind what I say—that must not be done."

"Why, now, what you got ag'in that pretty little Kanuck?"

"Nothing whatever; she's a treasure, she's a beauty, with the man of her heart to guide her along; but Rob Hilton is not that man, and she is not the girl of his heart. That was a little escapade; they have never really chosen each other; the marriage was a fake, and they've both got a haunting suspicion of that fact, too."

The great Belcher looked stoutly, boldly, at the doctor; the doctor's keen eyes did not flinch.

"Look a' what your Rob Hilton was when he come here," at last spoke Belcher, in a tone of unappreciated merit that could not help but thrill his listener with its wonder and reproach, "an' then look a' what I've made of him."

"*You* made of him?"

"Sure as herrin' for breakfast. Sure. He come here, out o' the booze settlements thar' to his native town, a natterally struttin' Shang-hi rooster with Bantam lightness o' dispersion an' a goose giggle. An' me, or somebody else—call it me—tied him down to this dull 'arth with a sense o' responsibilities an' duties an' sorrers, an' all sech drippin's from the mother cow necessary ter raise up a healthy calf. Ain't that so?" The doctor bit his lip, and briefly nodded.

"He was a derelic', he was," continued Belcher, "on the drift, ef ever the' was one; an' somebody—call it me—took an' anchored of 'im so tight he's been grubbin' away contented ever sence, sweatin' all the microbes an' tomfoolery out er his sestem, an' raisin' pertaters three dozen to the hill. An' now you come over from New York an' want ter heave over all his ballas' an' lighten up on his moorin's an' send him bumpin' an careenin' like a durn tramp o' the seas ag'in. My humfrey, but you got a gall on ye."

Doctor Margate laughed hilariously, but Belcher regarded him with a steady reprobation and made not the slightest acknowledgment of the ring of sympathy in his tones.

"The Senate misses you, Captain Belcher—you don't miss the Senate any. As a matter of fact, though, it was I who sent Robert Hilton to grubbing in the earth, and a certain Captain Jim—a—a—Jim Turbine has been a sort of hovering—a—decent fellow, with a weather eye out for poor Rob and Mary in this Beulah land to see that the wolves did not get them quite; and *you*, Captain Belcher, you, being in a humorous mood, practiced some of your tremendous pleasantries on poor Rob, putting him in an insufferably false position. It was what I call a dastardly piece of work."

"Git out," said Belcher coolly; "you a man o' science, by Tamarack, and don't know what the ropes is that fa'rly cows a man an' knocks all the galé out er him so's what friskiness he has left is no more 'n a sucklin' lamp, jumpin' on all fours an' kickin' out his hin' legs at nothin'. You don't know—that your ken-try air an' your honest t'il an' all yer cornmeal mush

an' moonshine wouldn't 'a' proved a rope ter holt that derelic', no more 'n a strand o' knittin' cotton. No sir, it was *me* done it. Joke or 'arnest, it was me hove out the right size o' cable—it was that thar' marriage-tie done the job."

The broad smile on Doctor Margate's hypnotized countenance again culminated in explosive laughter.

"The world of political rivalry, of commercial activity, misses you, Captain Belcher—but you do not miss it. How admirably, for instance, you ride on a log. The pounding over rocks and ruts seems to give you only a firmer seat and a more graceful carriage, while I joggle about like a cork, in comparison, and am sometimes compelled to clutch out wildly. Well, what shall we do about Rob? Will you see to it—will you aid Captain Jim Turbine in seeing to it (for I regret to say that I am called away, and must leave Power Lot to-morrow)—that housekeeping for Rob and Cuby on the hill shall never begin? Will you step in at the needful moment and in full good season, and deliver Rob of the false burden he is bearing? I could make you considerable trouble if I chose to do so. I shall be proud to be your friend and act in unison with you if you will engage fairly to do what I ask."

Captain Belcher glowered severely at the doctor, then looked off to the fir trees and sniffed a sniff of scorn.

"Ye couldn't drag Cuby Tee-bo up to the hill to housekeep along o' Rob. The' ain't no kind o' hawser ye could fashion 'd haul that gal up there ter wash out 'er fryin'pan an' hang out 'er clo's accordin' as Rob Hilton an' Ma'y Sting'ree an' Widder Treet an' the

rest of 'em thinks fryin'pans ought ter be washed an' clo's hung. No, sir. An' I don't blame 'er. She'd fling 'er fryin'pan an' 'er suds straight inter the faces o' the whole caboodle of 'em. An' I'd do the same ef I was her. Don't you worry. Cuby Tee-bo ain't ketched yet."

"Well, well!"

"You know some things thar' whar' you come from, an' you been roun' the worl' eatin' yer iysters on the harf-shell an' smokin' yer Havanas down in the cabin s'loon, but I been roun' the worl' watchin' out from the herrie'n deck, with the rain hiss'n' at me an' the salt bitin' me, ontill I know purty well what's up in any 'arthly latertude whar' I happen ter be drivin' my craft f'r the time bein'. That's me."

"I believe you."

"Now the' ain't no harm goin' ter happen ter Rob Hilton by way of bindin' of him ter anybody 't 'tain't best p'rhaps f'r him ter be boun' to, an' that anyways don't want him. Meanwhiles you let 'im dig his crap o' pertaters. That's my 'dvice. F'r though he don't reckon on it, mebbey he's a-workin' in a holt on the proud sperrit o' that ar high-toned, scholardly Ma'y Sting'ree, that 'ud sure make him toe the mark to every spellin' match that's comin' to him in this worl'. The' ain't nothin' tunes up the melodium of love in a case like hern, like a big, slow-ponderin', easy-laughin', slap-the-whole-menagery-in-the-mouth and die-for-ye cuss like Rob Hilton."

"Impossible."

"Nothin' ain't impossible from the herrie'n deck. This 'ere old worl' c'n kick up more cyclones to the

squar' inch an' s'prise more folks to the squar' minute than any other worl' I ever see."

"True."

"An ef the' is anythin' drorin' her to-wards him, it's jest that good, set-up-straight-in-meetin', none-o'-the-preserves-thank-ye, small-piece-o'-pie-f'r-me-please way in which he is a-regardin' his oblegations to Cuby Tee-bo. See? As f'r Cuby, she's a good gal, though she's a wild one and a gay one, she is, an' her mettle is up ter somethin' tough 't knows how ter sail a boat. D' ye ketch on?"

"No."

"Wal', she wants Jim, that's who she wants."

"He seems a decent sort of fellow."

"'Decent sort o' feller?' By the Great Nor'easter, what are you a-lookin' f'r? Why, Jim Turbine an' me c'd run this whole conternent ef we was only giv' a fa'r post o' observation an' c'd find some chairs our size to set in. I reckon you don't know all the' is ter be knowed about Jim Turbine an' me."

The doctor was silent.

"Jim Turbine c'n go out on a sea 't spells dead-man to ary other mortal, an' beat in home through the hell-racket o' the elerments smokin' his pipe at sundown, wishin' 't the wind 'ud breeze so 't there 'd be somethin' doin'. That's me an' Jim. He c'n make a fool o' himself ev'ry day in the week, like he's been a-doin' readin' books an' drulin' at the mouth about the 'beauties o' natur', an' all sech, tell he's got a notion he wants somethin' high-toneder 'n what his bringin' up 'll allow him; but jest wait tell the gale strikes him fa'r abeam an' he'll reel 'round an' right up on an even keel ev'ry

time. Ef he ever *does* git drowned he won't *git* drowned—he'll show up somewhar'. An' that's me an' Jim, an' be d—d to ye."

Captain Belcher refilled his pipe, his cowhide boots swaying freely in sympathy with the perils of his present method of transit; a jolt of unusual violence, over a stump, separated him for a space from his affinity with the log; he descended, however, precisely in his former chosen seat, uninterrupted in his attentions to his pipe and wholly unperturbed. But the doctor, as a result of the catastrophe, sat down abruptly in the road, where he contemplated in some bewilderment for the moment his unexpected change of base.

"Shall I stop 'em?" Captain Belcher called back to him cheerfully, "or c'n ye jump on while the train's movin'?"

"I won't board the train again, thank you. I need *exercise*," replied Doctor Margate dryly, as he rose. "I'll walk back home."

"Hold on," yelled the captain, himself descending and shouting and belaboring a halt on his oxen; "I want a word with ye 'fore ye go. Ye're a man o' straight good sense, an' I respec' ye. I've been hove off myself by a stump lesser size 'n that."

"I haven't been in training, you see," replied the doctor, with no trace of vexation in his manner or his tone.

"No, ye ain't had the 'dvantages a man like you ought ter had," said Belcher, standing regally thoughtful, the veteran of many scars, of well-sustained shipwreck, and of a hide seemingly impregnable at last to all save added windburn. "Ye'd rate along o' me an'

Jim ef ye 'd had harf a chance in the worl'." He meditated, and in spite of the dictates of sound reason and common sense against such unconscionable boasting, the doctor admired him and was more than half inclined to take him at his own estimation.

"The question is," said Belcher at last, withdrawing his gaze from a profound contemplation of the distant Bay of Fundy, "be you a-goin' ter keep yer mouth shet?"

"Not in the least, if I see fit to open it," replied Doctor Margate.

"That's the talk," exclaimed Belcher approvingly; "but be ye goin' ter see fit ter *keep it shet*—that's the question. Come now, as the gospil says, an' le's figger this out tergether. Do ye want ter tell Rob Hilton—ter-morrer, f'r instance—that the' 's nothin' bindin' of him here? F'r *he* ain't got no notion 't thar' 's any chance for him along o' Ma'y Sting'ree, no more 'n I have of ailyenatin' the 'ffections o' the wife o' the Old Man in the Moon."

"That settles it."

"An' I doubt ef Ma'y Sting'ree has took the idee inter her head one bit yit either. No sir—it's me 't has figgered out this match."

"Not you and Jim?"

"Jim's sore—sore as a bile. He wusships the groun' Ma'y treads on. But he ain't f'r her. Jim's got many a wil' sea yit ter sail afore *he* dies. Ef Jim goes ter homin', it had ought ter be with some mid-ocean bird o' his own breed. Jim thinks he'd like ter git civerlized and live ashore, but he wouldn't—them ol' whitecaps out thar' 'ud call him, an' he'd ruffle

his feathers an' stretch his neck, an' off he'd go. Ho-hum, it's tough on Jim; but he won't go under; ye needn't ter worry 'bout Jim."

"I won't. I am more concerned about the match you propose to make between Miss Stingaree and Rob Hilton."

"Easy, easy! Whar' thar' 's a woman in the calkulation the' 's no knowin' when ye may look out an' find yer weather-vane 's clean blowed off the barn. Easy now. But you let Rob bide an' keep on workin' f'r a while. He couldn't git Cuby ef he tried. An' he won't git put in no box, now I promise ye, ef that 'll do. I promise ye."

"Well."

"An' you'll keep yer mouth shet about any little frolick anybody mon't 'a' played? I ain't sayin' who. You'll lay low tell the storm's over, an' the flyin'jib's run up, an' all's well some way 'r another, won't ye? That's what I want ter know."

"Why, yes, under the circumstances, and considering that you promise to make it all clear as daylight at the auspicious moment, I think I may safely say I will leave that for the present to your judgment—and your conscience. But the time must come soon, Captain Belcher."

"Easy! easy! This is goin' ter be a tejus mess o' ropes, mebbby, an' we got ter keep both eyes shet whilst we squint with one and wink with t'other. Wal', I'm sorry ye ain't goin' ter stay long enough ter come 'round an' git acquainted with my folks, Doctor."

"But at least I congratulate myself, Captain Belcher, on having become acquainted with you."

“Wal, I won’t deny that ye’ll find me thirty-six inches ter the yard with plenty over ter ’low f’r shrinkage, ev’ry time. Come ’n see us ag’in. Do. Sorry our ways in this worl’ did n’ lie par’lel, Doctor,” concluded Captain Belcher with a splendid, dismissing, commiserating wave of the hand.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TEST

IT had come time for Rob to sail over to Waldeck with me to turn his crop of potatoes into good banknotes. He was as elated as a boy—not with the prospect of renting a house for Cuby and laying in flour and fish for the winter; no, but with the thought of the day's sail. A long day, it meant to him, a sort of epitome of freedom and adventure before he put on the yoke again and settled down to the drag.

"Jim," he said, as the *Mary* leaped through the Gut at high tide, like a bird shivering to try her wings over seas, "I wish we could sail her to Europe. Gad, I wish we could sail her to the ends of the earth. If I were rich as I was once I'd have a yacht—I will, when my ship comes in again; and, by Heaven, the voyages we'll go, Jim."

There was the trouble. There was no meek, struggling look in Rob's eyes, now; there was the "keen" for mad freedom. The sea does that. The hills, with the sea to glimpse afar, give you steadiness, which is greatest of all, I know; but take a boat that sails true, and a wind that forces the joy of health and daring into your very breath, and changing shores that lure you on and on, and you understand how runaways feel; you understand it well. You even feel, without God's good dart of shame, the marauding heart that has its

own will, in stinging air and over wild seas, and for its own will would die vaingloriously, reckless and glad as its brother elements.

And Rob had been prisoned away from the mighty galloping horse of the deep that had so often flung out a beckoning mane to him. This was his first sail since I had brought him to Power Lot, God Help Us—a dissipated lordling crouched ruefully in the stern of my boat; now he stood erect and fearless, as handsome a fellow as ever I set eyes upon. But the spirit of the salt, wide waste about him and the way my little vessel ripped the foam up had entered into him. This it was to be a man, to sail out thus. Not the meek bearing of a yoke.

I had foreseen the temptation this whole day's business would be to Rob. The train went from Waldeck in the afternoon, at an hour when we must inevitably be there waiting the tide. His pockets would be full of money once more. I had talked it over with Mary.

"Take him, Jim," she said. "He must be put to the test sometime." And then, very gravely, as if thinking to herself far away, she said, "He will stand." But women know neither the sea nor the heart of a man.

"He will stand," she had said. What did *she* care, I wondered. The light in her eyes was no more than nature often sent there to startle people with its beauty, no more for him than for the rest of the universe whom the imperious heart of the woman condoned with its sublime faith and pity.

Rob was not going to stand—I felt it in my bones

as I regarded him now. I loved the lad. I wanted him to bear the test.

"The sea, and the wide bearin's of it, has tempted me lots o' times, Rob," I said. "But I've hung 'round. Tell the truth, I've felt a sort of concern about Mary Stingaree. Bate might—strike her. Or she might be left there, sick and alone. Some harm might happen her; and—though she's nothing to me, and never can be, except the best friend I ever had, yet she kind o' draws me—she holds me. Many's the time she's told me, sharp, meaning it for my sake, I know, to go off where I could do better; but I sort of hung 'round within hailing distance, as ye might say."

"She's worthy of it," said Rob, and his flushed tanned face straightened out drawn and thin as he spoke.

"Jim, you understand. If it was for *her*, if she were my wife—oh, God—living and digging there in Power Lot—*anything* wouldn't be hard. It would be great, Jim. But I'm up against something rocky that I don't clearly understand, either; and the very thought of it sickens me, old man."

"Well, I've looked at it this way: if I could care for her and guard her a bit, if I could only win her respect; since I could not have her love, her respect is a mighty good gauge to go by when a man's tryin'—to make a man of himself."

"Yes," said Rob, and a tingling look of pain turned his face red again. "Yes, that's true, Jim. And you have been a guard and a help to her, in ways some of us know, though *she* doesn't begin to know it all. But as for me, Jim, I've been more of a worry to her than

anything else; and if she does finally marry Doctor Margate—for he is one not to give it up—and if she goes away, I—I don't know as I could face it out, what I've undertaken to do; I don't know as it would be of any use."

"Well, if you were just doing it for her to look at, and approve, and perhaps applaud ye, I don't believe she would respect ye for that. But if you've made a contract between yourself and the A'mighty to fight this fight out, like the splendid gentleman and wrestler that you are, Rob Hilton, why, of course, you wouldn't give up your contract, whether Mary Stingaree was looking on or not. Besides, I don't know that it's *love* she feels for ye—I don't suppose it is—but it's an interest; and I tell ye right now, it would break her heart if you cut the traces or bungled your job or came home stuttering and silly with drink, now."

"I reckon she would not break her heart much over *me*," said Rob, with a smile poignant with the hopeless sweetness of the thought.

"Then you don't know her."

"That isn't love," said poor Rob; "that's philanthropy, pure and simple. I don't give a tuppence for it."

"Mary makes out they're one and the same thing—something steadf'st—something to hold by; and, by God, I believe she's right. Look at Bate—he thinks sometimes he loves Cuby, but what does that kind of love amount to?"

I had forgotten for the instant Rob's relation to that matter. He turned cold and white. Then he spoke, through set teeth.

"Jim, do you consider that I'm like Bate Stingaree?"

"No, lad—not for a minute."

The slumbering storm in his blue eyes turned them black; then he bit his lips and melted.

"After all," he said, "I was going to make a chum of him when I first came—and there's excuse for him; but I had a great chance in the world. Oh, Jim, what a fool I've been! What a fool, fool, fool! I wish you'd lose your rudder, I wish you'd lose your bearings, and we could get carried where we should never hear of Power Lot, nor any other day of my past life again."

"We're right there, now. You take the helm o' yerself an' yer life this blessed minute, an' it'll be just the same as if ye'd always steered."

"What? That isn't true."

"I'm running myself on wrong principles, then. But I ain't running on wrong principles. I know what I'm about. So long as I'm steering steady, so long as I'm steering true, and my hand fails not and my heart quails not, who's a-going to throw it up at me that I been shipwrecked once on a time, or run aground on the shoals somewheres? What do I care if they do? Who *don't* get wrecked in one way 'r another? That ain't the point; it's what I'm doing *now* concerns me; and just because I had my fling on the rocks an' swallowed brine till I was pretty near done for, I know the sea better, an' better how to sail 'er now. I know better where the rocks an' shoals lays for me, Rob."

"Well, that may be true."

"I'm steerin' steadier, I'm steerin' truer 'n what I was, and I shall come into port by an' by like a man ought to come. Best o' all, maybe, I got a ballas' o'

pity along with me now f'r all manner o' shipwrecked men everywheres. I ain't lost nothin', so 's I mind my helm now—I got gain by it."

"Sure, it would brace a fellow up if he could look at it that way."

"Rob, I kind o' wonder at the way you flat out sometimes, and I wish to thunder you'd get up on your hind legs and stay there, and steer yourself on, with a don't-give-a-d—n f'r everythin' 'xceptin' your straight course, like the brave cuss you be."

Rob tried to smile, but something of this bright day had turned to ashes; he was thinking still of the woman he had no hope to win, and maybe he was thinking it would make no difference, therefore, if he shirked the whole fight. I tried to buoy myself up to hope for the best. In my soul I felt that there was trouble coming. He recovered from his fit of depression, but ah, the reckless, laughing wind, the tossing sea, and freedom. Never siren sang to tempted man as the elements sang to Rob that day.

He did not seem to crave the drink, even when he had an opportunity that it was not considered one bit polite, among the Waldeckers, to refuse. When we had sold his potatoes at a fancy price at Burt's market—and they were fancy potatoes too, having turned out extra smooth and pretty, as things sometimes do for children and folks who don't understand the game—Burt said, friendly:

"Come on over across and take somethin' to swash the mildew out o' yer throats. Come on." He was putting on his coat to go out with us. I wished that I'd had a chance to tip the wink to Burt beforehand

not to be offering his hospitalities. I need not have had any fears on that score.

"Thank you very much," said Rob, as monotonous and indifferent as you've sometimes heard a boy speak his piece in school. "I don't drink. I don't care for it. I'll wait for you, Jim."

"Oh, Jim ain't got into long pants yet, neither," said Burt, laughing. "The invitation was to you, young man. Wal', it's a fool thing, this drinkin'. Give my regards to the rest o' the infant class," he remarked drolly, in a low tone, as we went out.

Rob drew me out of sight with him into the lee of an old shop, and counted his money again. Two hundred dollars in banknotes.

"And not long ago I was swiping an egg to get a postage stamp, Jim," he chuckled, and his white teeth shone.

He took out a twenty-dollar note, put it in his purse, and stowed away the rest in an inside pocket, with a double row of pins—which I was able to make over to him from the lapel of my coat—as a further safeguard to his treasure.

"I am going into potato-raising," said Rob, joyously, as we swung off. "I'm going into the business on a big scale, Jim. Your Burt, there, told me he'd take and export any quantity o' such potatoes as those I brought him. I'll have more land when I rent the Treet place, and another season, I'll have a thousand dollars"—he patted his breast, where the money lay—"where now I've only two hundred. I shouldn't wonder if I'd rent more land, and set other people to work for me. Good Lord!" spoke this son of a speculator, "I

should think you fellows would have seen there's money in it, Jim. Here am I, a greenhorn at the business, and there's not another man in Power Lot, bluffs or River, that 'll stow away two hundred dollars in his pocket this season—what are you all thinking of, I wonder.”

So elated was he, he had even forgotten the voracious hunger on which we had passed some sympathetic remarks only a little while before.

“Well, Rob, I was thinking of dinner; and there'll be lots of dinners to be looked out for, if you stand as the head of a family this coming winter, and possible illness, and chances of poor luck, and all that. Go careful on that two hundred dollars, Rob.”

The sordid future rose before him again, and perhaps I did unwisely to harp on that string of mean necessity and hard duty. Rob's inflation as a moneyed individual, and—for the first time in his life—a sporter of banknotes earned through his own efforts, abundantly sustained him, though.

“Come on, old man,” he said, putting an arm on my shoulder, “I'm starving. It's my treat this time, mind you. I owe all I got to you, anyway. We'll blow out for all the grub they can show up. Where are the frescoed dining-halls of Waldeck, eh?”

Now, I had quite a bit of money saved in the bank—not much, but more than Rob had snugged against his breast. But he had all the air of a rich man. It was ingrained in him, and a sort of ease and grace, born to him when *he* was born; it did not make any difference that his hands had grown rough, and that linen collars and cuffs were a dream of the past. He looked every inch an easy gentleman, and as if he were sporting in

flannel shirt and the potato-business just for the lark of the thing.

We had our meal together at the only restaurant in Waldeck, a coarse place, where the draught sweeping in from the water on one side, and the infernal suction of a quarry-well on the other, was so stiff that in one instance it actually took up a corner of the tablecloth and with it knocked the vinegar cruets into the sugar bowl and swept the pepper-box clean off on to the floor.

Rob was hilarious, notwithstanding that the tea was weak. The admiring waitress hovered over him as if he had been a young god.

"Shall I shet the windows, sir?" she said, looking exclusively at Rob.

"No," said Rob. "Great Tamarack, no! We live on wind—that's where we hail from—this is nothing but a cooling zephyr to us. No, sweet maiden—let her blow."

He emptied the remainder of the vinegar into the sugar-bowl and stirred it briskly. "Bring us some soda, if you please, fair maiden," he observed, still briskly stirring, "and we will show you some superlative 'fizz.' Hasten—the compound waits only for the enlivening application of saleratus." The gale blew his fair hair in a tangle over his forehead, and his teeth gleamed. The girl giggled ecstatically, as though such wit had never before scintillated through that base apartment.

"I tell you," she murmured, with an air of confiding her very soul to Rob, "if you want that—'fizz,' as you call it—you can get it fine over to the hotel. *This*

place ain't got no style to it, anyway. You can get champagne, or anything you want, over to the hotel; it's a lot better than this place, and stylisher." She tossed her head, as one with cosmopolitan experience though circumscribed in vocation by low necessity.

Rob put on a sober look. "You ought not to tell that to young fellows from the country," said he whimsically. "However, I am not going to the hotel. I'm a married man, I believe, and I am going down here to the furniture store to get some housekeeping things for my Tootsy-Wootsy. Isn't that so, Captain Turbine? Come, Captain, however regretfully, I suppose we must be on the move."

He haled me forth by my official title, leaving a fee for the girl on the table. She picked it up, but did not even thank him: she watched his retreat from the door so sadly.

"Come on, Jim," said the light-hearted Rob, "I'm going to blow out this twenty dollars in some parlor knick-knacks to please Cuby."

The very fact that he urged me to go with him scattered every lingering doubt in my mind as to his reliability and good faith. I had business of my own to attend to, and we had only an hour before the tide would serve for sailing back. As for the train, Rob had never once looked that way, though there was a great noise of loading freight from the wharf in the distance, and the engine stood puffing there in the yards.

I went on about my own affairs. At two o'clock I went down to the boat, as agreed. There were Rob's parlor gimcracks nicely stowed away, and I whistled

about, getting ready to run up sail, sure every moment I'd see his bright face appearing to me.

Rob did not come. It was time for the train to pull out from the yard. The lad might be watching among the loafers there. He was a great hand for a laugh and a joke with anybody and a bit of excitement. So I marched over, but there was no handsome, stalwart Rob in that slouching group. Something got a hard grip at my heart. I rushed through every car on the train, searching. I knew the conductor. He let me work my way, tumbling and searching, through the freight.

"What's up, Jim?" he called to me, and "All aboard," in the same breath, and the train was moving when I jumped.

Probably Rob was down in the boat waiting for me. Still I did not doubt him, and I turned, shamefaced, trusting that he had not seen my crazy leap from the train. I could see the boat stepping idly to her anchor in the harbor, but no blond head shining there. Still I did not doubt. He was loitering about somewhere in the dirty little town; some tobacconist's, or candy shop (with a special thought to Rhody), or some dog fight, or Punch and Judy show—that would be Rob, nursing out his holiday to the fullest extent.

So I paced up and down the one "Main" street, looking in everywhere, and making my affectedly light-hearted inquiry.

"Seen a tall fellow?—good-looking, light hair, blue flannel shirt, sort of showy necktie; thought you might 'a' seen him swaggering along somewheres—fine-looking fellow, you'd 'a' noticed him."

"Seen him around with *you*, whiles back," was the invariable response; "ain't seen him since."

Search was made at the hotel; there too I knew the proprietor. Back and forth from the town to the boat I went. At dusk I entered the forlorn restaurant again.

"You seen my friend anywhere?" I said carelessly, to the girl.

"Te, he!" she tittered, "I thought you'd lose *him*. No, *I* ain't seen him," she added, with the regretful accents of truth.

I ordered my supper as the natural excuse for my entrance.

"'Tootsy-Wootsy' 'll have to wait a while for her pretty things," said Miss, knowingly, as she brought me my tea. "Hubby's over to the hotel getting some 'fizz,' after all, I reckon."

"No," said I, cheerily; "he ain't that kind."

And I forced down my supper, though the food choked me.

Then, from Main Street to the boat, with an air of loafing and sauntering, I alternated, like the pendulum of a clock. I gave up the boat, and paced the street till the last light went out and every shed and store was black as the night staring coldly at me; and then I began to curse Rob in my soul, for a weak liar and a coward.

I took a room at the hotel and turned in to bed. I could not sleep. My love for Rob had turned to stone. I longed to see him beaten, thrashed, and I would have borne a hand in doing it. But to go back without him to-morrow, the cause of his ruin; who had so trusted

him, and who would have given my lifeblood for him—to go back without him, and to meet Mary!

I ground my teeth. “The cur, he is,” I said, “the thankless, foolish, selfish, miserable cur.” And thus anchored on the rock of indignation, with weariness in every bone, I sank off into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER XXII

“HE WILL STAND”

It was a drizzly, foggy morning, scarcely daylight, when a repeated knocking at my door wakened me.

I cared no more than as if I had been lead—my heart was leaden; my senses, numbed by chagrin and despair, were leaden. It might be afternoon—I might be sleeping over still another tide for all I cared.

The knocking grew more distinct.

“Who is there—and what do ye want?” I growled.

“Jim,” said a voice, and I started from my bed, for it was Rob’s voice, only husky and weak, like the ghost of Rob.

“Drunk!” I muttered to myself. But it was he—Rob—and I sprang to the door and opened it.

Such a sight never saw I before in the gray of the morning. I drew him in, horrified, and locked the door behind us. His hair was matted with blood, his face bruised and caked with mire and blood, his shirt and trousers were in rags, and one hand hung helpless at his side.

“My God, Rob!” said I, and began the work of bathing and binding up his wounds without another word. When I had his face recognizable again, and found that his arm was not broken, only so painfully sprained that it was almost worse, he lay back on the pillows, his lips drawn and pinched with suffering, his eyes sunken like a man’s who has been to the grave itself.

"Jim," said he hoarsely, "I never touched a drop. Jim—I give you my word, before my Creator, there was no drink—in this night's business."

"I believe you, Rob. Never mind about explaining now. Rest a bit."

"And—they took my money—every scrap of it."

"What! In God's name——"

"I went—after we parted there—to get the things for Cuby—and I carried them down to the boat——"

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, laddie—let's fix these pillows here. There's time enough, wait a little, now——"

"No—I want to tell you. Then I went back to the town and bought some little trifles—for Mrs. Skipper and Rhody—and I bought half-a-dozen cigars. I'm such a dam' fool of a young one, Jim, I'd had that pleasing my mind and tickling my shopping-list, all the time, how I'd get half-a-dozen prime cigars for you and me to smoke going home."

He smiled, and I let him take his own way for reel-ing off his yarn, for it was lying heavy on him till it was spoken. He was *there*—Rob, himself—with truth shining like sunlight on his poor, hurt face; and if any degree of the high joy and gush of love and yearning that I felt for him then showed in the smile I gave him back, he must have thought I was a soft one for a son of Neptune.

"And I got them," he went on, "and coming out of the shop—you know how the quarry runs along there—dark—back of the shops—for a ways, along there—I thought, if I could get into an alleyway maybe it would shut off the wind enough for me to strike a match—and light up my old pipe."

"I was holding the match protected in the scoop of my hand—and was leaning forward to light up—when a blow with a loaded club struck me—terribly—on the head—and, Jim, the last thing I saw, and all I saw in that flash as I fell—hush—you come nearer—I saw Bate Stingaree's hand. I know that hand—and I saw it. It was there, Jim, over me—as sure as judgment day—I know that hand—and I saw it.

"The next thing I knew—when I came to—I was lying among the rocks and mire—at the bottom of that quarry; but *where* I was, at first, I did not know. Jim, it was hell—black—dead o' night—and one arm no good—only sending tortures through me. I felt the mire around me—and I crawled and felt the rocks each side; and it may have been—I don't know how long—before the blow came back to me, and the sight, sure, of that dreadful, familiar hand—and I realized that I had been thrown over into the quarry for dead; and if I'd come to half an hour later, the tide that fills up everything would have covered me, too.

"I did not cry out nor call—I thought they might be hiding somewhere about. I tried to climb out, but in the darkness I had to go by feeling, and only one arm to work with—and I'd fall back and have to begin again. How long it seemed down there, Jim, only God knows—till morning came enough so I could see the outline of things—faint—and then I managed to climb up; and I reasoned it out you would be here at the hotel. My body was in agony; but I think that blow——"

Rob actually laughed, and the sunken blue eyes darkened wide with mirth—"I think that blow has

cleared my head as nothing ever did before, Jim, and knocked all fear out of me, for big things or little, forevermore. I saw things clear. I limped up here—the janitor and his boy were pottering around gathering some kindlings in the sheds, and the back doors were open. I passed in, not caring whether they saw me or not—they did not see me—no one else was stirring. I went up to the slate where they register guests in the office, and found your name and the number of your room—and here I am. God bless you, Jim, is it really your face looking down at me? I thought once I should die there without getting to you. And I'm cleaned out—a pauper again—a penniless, crippled——”

“You are not going to be crippled,” said I, “and in a week's time you'll be as pretty as ever. But I'm going out to get some liniment and bandages for that arm of yours. You lie back now and take a nap.”

“Since you give me my choice,” said Rob, still carrying on by way of a joke, though his teeth were chattering with pain, “I'll wait to take my nap till you've brought something to ease this arm. Say, Jim, it hurts so I can fairly *hear* it ache. Kite out—that's a good fellow—and hurry up.”

I had a doctor there within the next fifteen minutes.

“Better give him a little nip o' something to brace him up while I find out what's the matter with this arm,” said the doctor significantly; “he's pretty well run down.”

“Oh, you get to work, sir, I don't want any dose,” Rob replied impatiently. “I'm game—this isn't a pin-

prick to what I've been through, soul and body. Only hurry up, please—get to work.”

Sawbones looked at him curiously, and stretched the poor arm, and worked it this way and that; and Rob, white as death, with his teeth clenched, never uttered a moan. Relief came presently, though, from the applications the good man put on, and Rob turned over on the pillows and slept like an infant.

I locked the bedroom door behind me, and left word no one was to disturb the occupant there. My purpose was to get to the bank for a couple o' hundred dollars that I meant should go back to Power Lot in Rob's pocket, after all; and to get to the furnishing store for some whole clothes for the lad. I found it was still too early to get admission either to bank or shops. So I crept up the hotel stairs again. I was for all the world like an old bird hovering over a nest. I turned the key softly and took a look at my fledgling. He was sleeping so deeply, free from pain, you could almost see the bliss of his rest in a halo 'round him. I drew the blinds down, against the sun should rise that far, for it was already making signs of burning up through the fog; then I went out again on tiptoe, locking my tragic young potato-farmer safe behind me.

The wind was beginning to leap up from the nor'-west a bit, and my heart was taking a swing with it. Rob had been true, and by the miracle of God his bruised body was safe alive. I'd never cease to be grateful for that to my dying day. I went down to my boat and overhauled her, to have all in readiness for sailing if Rob should waken fit for it later in the day. As I went back along Main Street I heard the

usual clattering in the restaurant, and the impulse took me to turn in there. By the time I had discussed some breakfast, and put a few observations to the table-girl, the bank would be open and I could get through business and make back to feed and clothe the nestling, who would be eager for trying his wings again as soon as possible.

"Wal'," said the girl commiseratingly, "here you be again, all by your lonesome. I guess *he* found the hotel, all right, and hasn't had to use no saleratus to make his drink beady—te-he! He's takin' a good, long nap this mornin', I reckon?"

"That's just where you are mistaken," said I gayly; "he hasn't touched a drop of drink of any kind. *He's* all right."

Her face fell, and she said insolently, "Why doesn't he come and have breakfast with you, then?"

"Oh, he's a swell; he'll take his breakfast at the hotel," I made answer; "he's something rather choice." She set the remaining dishes down very noisily at my plate.

"You didn't see any other friends o' mine in here yesterday, did ye?" said I, with a bald attempt at being genial.

"You must be a lunkhead," she rejoined, "how do I know who your friends are?"

"Sure. You're right. But, for instance now, a dark fellow, sort of surly acting,—wonder if you saw him?"

"Guess he wasn't anxious for your company. Him and another man sneaked in here, soon as you and your 'choice' article left."

“Him and the Frenchman?”

“French or Dutch or Portugee, what do I care?”

“Of course not.” I placed a fee for her on the table and spoke lightly. “They did not say among themselves where they left their boat, did they? She wasn’t visible in harbor.”

“No,” said she shortly. “They acted like a pair of sneaks, and gobbled their vittles, and lit out. Thank ye”—she picked up the silver, but hustled about as though it were my business to be gone. Rob would never have had such brusque treatment at her hands. Little I cared. Rob’s vision of the familiar hand as he fell was no hallucination. If the blow had cleared his head, it had mazed and staggered mine.

That Bate mingled some idiocy with his brutality, I knew. But how could he follow us to Waldeck and dine immediately after we did at the restaurant, and expect to go undetected of those criminating circumstances? Then I remembered the slow, morbid working of his mind, with hate and revenge paramount as a motive; he had meant, no doubt, to “make a good job of it,” and by a hand’s turn luck might have favored him. A few moments more and the tide would have sucked in over Rob.

If the lad’s body had been discovered at ebb tide the conclusion would have been that he had staggered along the quarry edge hopelessly drunk, and had fallen over; his wounds would all have been accounted for by that fact. It was that one glimmer of a marked hand before Rob’s reeling senses that fixed the crime at Bate’s door. Not only would he have thrown Rob’s body to destruction, but the fair name for which the boy had

struggled so painfully and long; that would have gone down, too, with the undeserved stigma of "drunkard" at last and of one faithless and fallen,—who had proven so faithful, who, in spite of every temptation, had stood erect and true.

And one complication of it was that Mary must not know the details of this day's work. To shield and rescue Bate she had spent life and substance. To save him in the end was, after all, her chief earthly ambition. She must not know. I would seek him out by himself, and I would send terror through his soul. He should walk straight hereafter for fear of me. But Mary must not know.

So I did my errands in the town, winning out to this conclusion of the matter, and with the next tide Rob and I set sail for home. It was not till we had clipped past Barstake Island to a fair wind that Rob, fingering over his new jacket with his able hand, found the pocket secured by two rows of pins, just as the old one had been. Blushing and trembling, he worked in and found the roll of two hundred dollars.

"D—n you, Jim," said the boy, in a queer voice that belied the malediction of his words; and he put his head down and sobbed before he could speak again.

"You know what I meant, Jim. You're enough to make a man want to live, just because there is such a one as you to be his friend. But I can't take it, Jim."

"See here," said I, reasonable, "there ain't any sentiment about this. I'd give my blood for you, lad, and all I have for you, for that matter. You're true. But it isn't that. We've got to go on, you and I, as if nothing had happened. Mary must not know about

this business of Bate's. She never would know from *you*——”

I stopped him, for the splendid loyalty and vindication that blazed in his eyes.

“I know that, Rob. Never would she have known from you. I don't need your word. I would take my dying oath on it, on the Bible, she never would know, from you. But we've got to act this thing out reasonable. You've got to go home to Mary's with your money. And, Rob, don't you fret; you'll pay it back to me. I am thinking,” I sighed, “it may be easier than you think, now, for you to pay it back to me sometime. That 'll be all right. Meanwhile, you and I have got to work together in this business, hand in hand.”

“Jim, I'm a great ass of a baby, with my cheap pride, and all; but I wanted to say that first to you—‘Mary must not know.’ I've said it over and over to myself times enough. I wanted to say it to you.”

“You didn't need to. I knew it of you.”

“Jim, if I don't pay it back, it won't be for lack of anything a man can do or bear or deny himself.”

“I know, Rob. You needn't to talk.”

We went up to the Stingaree house together. I wanted to do that, and Rob let me—Rob, with his face patched up with courtplaster and his arm in a sling. It was night, and for some reasons, we were glad of that.

Well, if I'm anything in line of descent from a wizard, I'm surely mighty soft-born of humanity, too, so far as reading people's hearts from their faces go; and something got settled in *my* heart for good and all when Mary Stingaree opened the door and met us.

Some lives seem, anyway, just to run a predestined course of "giving up," "giving up," and, on any occasion when they wouldn't do it voluntarily, *having* to give up, until it turns by way of being a sort of meat and drink to them! you don't know but there's a fashion of enjoyment of its own goes along with it, like you can acquire a taste for bitter things, and make the best of it, and reckon it's all going to sum up for good, somehow, somewhere.

It was not for old Jim Turbine—that look in Mary's eyes; it was not for any thought in her heart for the great doctor; it was a look straight out of her soul, that she could not help, for that big, winsome, tragic-joy of a young man, Robert Hilton.

And the deuce of it was—see what a pair of haggard eyes and a score or so of bruises will do for a fellow!—he was not one bit of a simpleton to her any more. I believe, true, that blow and fall had sent him up instead of down, after all. He was a man glorious from head to foot, a sort of veteran, grave-faced, square-shouldered, plastered up though he was, with his maimed arm; he met her look straight.

"Miss Stingaree," said he, "I met with an accident. But on my word as a man, it was not drink. I never touched a drop."

"I'm witness to that," said I.

"Rob's word does not need any witness," said Mary, very softly, very gently, to us both.

Tears of triumph and joy sprang to Rob's eyes. And I too—well, I was content, as I trudged home alone in the dark. She, who had been my learned lady, and above all flesh, was mortal after all. How sweet to

ecstasy, that thought might be to the mortal who had made her mortal, a man can imagine. But Rob was too slow, and had been too deeply hurt once upon a time by her incisively expressed disapproval of him. Once he would have thrown himself to earth with joy, just to touch the hem of her dress ; now she was too far away for him to make the interpretation of her kindness one of common mortal accessibility.

Moreover, he was bound, and she was the lost glory of his dreams afar off in the sweet elysium of the things that “ cannot be.”

“ My lady,” said I, tramping on alone, “ and may it all be as you wish, and it shall be, if Jim Turbine can help ; but it was a proud heart you struck low in Rob Hilton—as proud as it was simple and humble, if I may so speak. And your soulful eyes will have to tell their story more than once before he’ll look into them with any hope to find *his* heaven.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL EXPOSITION

It was wonderful to me, how the Baptist church at the River got Cuby Tee-bo to act the part of "Grief" in their big Sunday-school exposition.

The girl was troubled and lonely, and they began to take an interest in her to draw her in; perhaps they saw the only way was to ascribe a prominent and showy part to her; and she consented with quiet dignity, and acted her part with an *éclat* that knocked the rest of them stupid with admiration and amaze.

For me, it is all a tender memory to me now; but we were a hawk-wild set all along the shore there; and it is not because I am making fun, the Lord knows, but if you would relate truthfully what takes place, why, you must just relate it, that is all; and to my thinking, mirth is not anything light; it's just the fall of the rain-drops where mighty clouds have rolled and lightnings clashed.

Anyway, I am but relating.

Old man Trawles was the only one they considered fit to act as chairman, on account of his natural dignity and faithfulness in past attendance, besides having the only real tall silk hat anywhere in that region; and perhaps most of all, the fact that he was going to marry Caroline Treet mantled him with a sort of general interest and sanctity.

And he consented to conduct the Sunday-school ex-

position just as readily as Cuby had to act the principal part in it.

"Now, Jacob," said Mrs. Treet, with a maiden blush at this use of her fiancé's name, "when you git up thar' to lead the meetin' don't you go to reelin' off too cunnin' and long a yarn o' yer own; but tickle 'em up so's they'll allus be likely to put ye at the head. What will tickle 'em most is few words from you, for what they'll come to see and hear is young folks play-actin', and especially how that dancin' sea-squall an' careenin' flyin'jib of a Cuby Tee-bo 'll look actin' out a lesson in Scriptur'. Say no more, for although I know the mericle o' the grain o' mustard seed, yet I have to own up to you here an' now—an' seek f'rgiveness ef I need ter be f'rgiven—that I could as easy cry as laugh."

"The sayin' is, 'Whosoever will,' Car'line," said sweet little Mrs. Skipper, who was also making a call at the house of the bride-elect. "I've heerd that the synod refused to help keep up the meet'n-house down thar' any longer ef they didn't make 't least one convert a year."

"Ef they knew Cuby," said Caroline, speaking from a muse of simple meditation, "they'd ought ter allow a five-year lease jest on makin' a convert out o' her alone, ef the' wa'n't no other dippin' in all that len'th o' time, I mean. But I guess it won't git so fur as that. What Cuby wants ter do is ter show off her smartness. But don't speak the word; f'r I hold by the grain o' mustard seed all the same, an' nobody's a-goin' ter rip the mericles out o' *my* Bible. Whilst I hold by it all, I'm plumb firmer on them than I be on ary other thing."

"It don't need any mericle to save *you*, Car'line," said her betrothed, gazing complacently upon her.

"That's as may be," assented Caroline, with a look of considerable gratification; "though my conniptions when my sinfulness first come home to me an' the preacher made out his derscriptions o' hell wasn't out-done by any at the goslin' age I then was. Thar' was some *tang* to that kind o' yeast, an' it has leavened on me up ever sence, though my c'nvictions has learned to spread themselves out in a calmer aspect, sech as is more becomin' to my years."

Jacob was about to assert that her years were still green and tender, but she waved him aside with a communication of her own.

"Do you, Jacob, whatever the goin's-on may be down 't the exp'sition, do you make quick an' haughty work o' the part they've giv' you to act in it, an' then lay off an' let them 'salt their own meal an' chase their own b'ars,' as the sayin' is."

Mrs. Skipper seemed a little shocked.

"It's a great compliment to Jacob, I'm sure," she said, "f'r them to ask him ter lead off the meet'n'. But it ain't hardly the place ter be haughty. The r'al true way is to go by the doctrines, an' jest stand an' open yer mouth and let the Lord fill it."

"I seen that tried once," said Caroline, and the retrospective seriousness of her features caused even Mrs. Skipper to listen with a mouth avid for tragedy. "Oh my, ya-as, I seen that tried once, an' the proudest man 't ever put his foot down in leathers was made so cheap by it that I don't know as he'd ever 'a' got over it to this day, ef he'd lived so long."

“Old Bots’ll Hurtle, he’d come into the church under some special quickenin’ that didn’t seem ter stay by him very long, for he got as cantackarous as ever, an’ they tryin’ ter hold him down to religion; an’ the minister comes an’ says, ‘Bots’ll, you ain’t led off yit on neither prayer nor testermoney,’ says he, ‘an’ I expect you ter lead off next Sunday evenin’ meet’n’,’ says he; and that meant somethin’ in them days, when Sunday evenin’ meet’n’s was as well attended as a carnival or a auction is now. So, Bots’ll, he begun a-studyin’ up on somethin’ tur’ble high-flown, f’r he was a vary proud man; but Mis’ Bots’ll—who’d allus been in grace—she shut him off. ‘The’ won’t no sech talk as that from a new convert go down with parson,’ said she; ‘you got ter come down about ten pegs an’ a lap-over,’ said she.

“‘What d’ ye mean?’ says Bots’ll. ‘Why,’ says she, ‘the only thing f’r you to do, an’ the only thing as parson ’ll let you do, is for you to stan up, contrite an’ humble, as ye ought ter be, an’ jest open yer mouth an’ let it be filled,’ says she.

“‘Shucks,’ says he, ‘I ain’t one o’ that kind. *You* could do it, an’ easy,’ says he to Mis’ Bots’ll, ‘but I run to somethin’ besides gab,’ says he. ‘I’d do better ter steddily up my piece beforehan’. But she kep’ at him, an’ the minister kep’ at him, that the’ wan’t no sech pompous, hifalutin’ works as them goin’ ter do f’r anybody so recent bro’t under c’nviction; so he snagged out o’ the whole subjec’, glad ter let it drop off his mind thinkin’, as I suppose we all do, that to-morrer might never come, or the minister furgit ter haul him up, or somethin’; but, no.

"I c'n hear the minister speakin' them words now—'Brother Bots'll Hurtle, we will listen to your testimony.' Wal', thar' he was, an' nothin' for it but ter foller their recipy now, an' see what 'ud come of it, live 'r die, fa'r weather 'r foul; so up he gits, sure enough, an' no sooner had he riz on his feet but what he sets his mouth open."

There followed a singular and untimely pause, during which Caroline's thoughts seemed to drift gently away to another channel.

Mrs. Skipper at last spoke, with a soft impatience.

"Was it filled, Car'line?"

"Nary so much as a fly offered," replied that fountain of unfailing reminiscence, "though it was the wane o' July, an' the meet'n'-house buzzed with 'em. No, nothin' went in," she reasserted, with grave literalness, "not even so much 's a fly. I set in the front row o' the choir whar' all was plain ter see."

"How long'd he wait?" said little Mrs. Skipper, even a proper sanctimony lost in her morbid avarice for the conclusion of the tale.

"Wal'," responded Caroline, obligingly searching her memory for the faithful particulars connected with this most extraordinary affair, "he waited tell all hopes was gone, that's sartin; but he was a proud man an' 'twan't easy ter give up. So he hung on tell Bill Hants—that was the best bass we ever had, an' set right back o' me—let out one o' them snorts o' his behind his handkercher; but he might as well blowed through a foghorn f'r all the good the handkercher done him to'ds deadenin' the sound; it didn't meller of it down a mite."

We looked to see if Caroline was struggling for an assuagement of any irreverent smiles that might be supposed to trouble her countenance at this point, but that mild and lovely face remained unruffled; though "Them was my goslin' years," she elucidated further, "an' maybe I wa'n't hard set to it not ter let out a screech o' some sort, myself; but women c'n allus hold themselves under better 'n what men can."

"They can so, Car'line," said old man Trawles, regarding her adoringly.

But Mrs. Skipper sighed, still absorbed in Bost'll Hurtle's speechless predicament.

"He didn't have the *sperrit*, ye see," said she.

"He had sperrit enough," affirmed our faithful narrator; "as soon as he got out o' that meet'n'-house you could 'a' heard him from Shag's Point to the Bay o' Fundy. But he laid it out in sw'arin' at his old flock o' sheep, that—jes' as though he hadn't enough already ter tanterlize him—jumped fence that very evenin' an' come caperin' down the road under a full moon ter meet him an' conduc' him home from meet'n'. Ef he was glad ter see 'em, ye'd never 'a' known it from the tune he let fly at 'em.

"But," concluded Caroline, "all this misery, strange ter say, only brung him an' Mis' Hurtle closer tergether in the end, f'r they both laid it onto the minister, an' stopped goin' ter meet'n', an' practiced good works amongst their neighbors that was needy or sick—f'r the Hurtles was very forehanded folks—an' spoke mild ter each other, an' stuck clost tergether as thieves all the rest o' their mortal lives."

"Poor creeturs," said Mrs. Skipper, with a hope

that she seemed to trust might not prove as illusory as it appeared to her to be unorthodox.

Jacob Trawles, duly impressed by Caroline's warnings, opened the Sunday-school exposition in due time with a few extremely brief and dignified remarks. The felicitations of a widely discursive mental ramble on the part of the old lover had no doubt been reckoned on by his audience; but any such small matter of disappointment was forgotten in the abundant wonder and entertainment afforded by Cuby Tee-bo's acting.

She was to impersonate "Grief," and the young fry of the Sunday-school were to mount the platform to her, one by one, and try to solace her by handing her each a bouquet and at the same time repeating a Scripture quotation to her, that was the whole scheme; but Cuby made it sufficient in composition, and thrilling and ornate in practice.

She sailed on to the platform with a sweep and a trailing of old sable-hued garments, lent from may sources for the occasion. It was supposed that she would stand up and declaim her part,—I understood it was so done in the rehearsals—but having got the whole ship under her command now, as it were, she seemed to consider that it might take a tedious long while for the children to get posted up fresh on their recitations, and be made to hold their nosegays properly, and prodded up to mounting the stage before so many people; so, what does she do, as soon as she'd sailed on to the boards herself, but wave her hand with all the hauteur and majesty of an accomplished tragedy queen, and says she, in a deep contralto that filled every part of the room:

"A chair. Bring to me a chair, and queeckly."

It wasn't long before she was provided with a chair, and she sat down and arranged her draperies so they'd give the most imposing effect all 'round her, then she crossed her little feet, in some new boots, and stuck 'em out where they'd show to the best advantage; and so, being fixed all right "Grief" began her lingo in expectation of the advance of some young one or other with a posy bunch and a Scripture passage.

"I am alone, alone," declaimed Cuby, in that splendid, pervading contralto, and with a self-possession upon her beyond all words of mine to describe; "alone with my gret sorrow. The deep-a-ness of my woe and dess-pair no mortal may know-a, or pour an a oint-a-ment on the tears that weep of my bleeting, all-broken hairt;" and she took out a handkerchief and gave a dab at her brown eyes, that were bright and gay as jewels.

"What is there before me," she trained on, "but the dar-r-rk entrance to the tomb—where lays all the daid folks."

Cuby's piece, at this point, was all spoken up; it was time for a kid to appear with a bouquet, which part of the programme being still unaccountably delayed, the leading lady proceeded to improvise without hesitation or embarrassment.

"Where lays all the daid folks. Oh, my griff is so drate-ful—it is tuff—tuff—tuff——"

At this crisis a small boy mercifully appeared on the scene, his cheeks still wet with rebellious tears, and his flowers of consolation trailing rudely at his side like a string of mackerel.

Cuby sighted him with what must have been relief, though her manner recognized no possibility of failure at any odds.

"Who are you?" she demanded, according to rote now, "who are you, that thus intrude upon the s-s-sacr-r-red domén of my griff? Come you to mek a mock at me? Depairt—for me, I would fén be left alone with my so drate-ful sorrow."

The solemnly enunciated words, the forbidding hauteur in Cuby's stunning, bright eyes bewildered the boy's progress beyond all hope. With a scream he threw the bouquet in a passion of terror at her head, and forgetting utterly the preconcerted text with which he had come to assuage her grief, he fled from the scene.

Cuby bit her lip contemptuously, but swung on, undismayed, supplying the missing link in the action of the piece by her own inventiveness and sang froid.

"The Bible talks, w'at they bring at me," she averred, "meks no deeference on my griff. It is continue on me all the sem. I theenk it grows worser on me every meenute. Oh, it is tuff——"

The flow of Cuby's improvisation was opportunely interrupted by the approach this time of a little girl in a starched white skirt and hair that had palpably but just been released from a night's seclusion in curl papers. She was a nervous little creature, and she advanced rapidly, as one urged to keen endeavor by a comparison of her case with that of the futile little boy who had bawled stupidly and thrown his nosegay at Cuby's head. She should have repeated first her

text of consolation, but in her wild haste she thrust the bouquet instantly into Cuby's hand with a curtsy done by lightning.

"Ezekiel, first chapter, third verse," she threw out, briskly enough, but there memory failed her.

"Ezekiel, first chapter, third verse," she shrieked out once more desperately.

Cuby's proper proceeding was still to bewail her woes, and to bid this new comforter also to "Begone." But Cuby's heart was moved by the little girl's distress, and originality and good sense triumphed over the cold dictates of preconceived art.

"Do not you cry, Minnee," she said blandly, soothingly, and unspeakably at her ease. "Was you over to the cove this mornin', Minnee? The leetle halibuts is comin' in there fine. I seen a leetle girl no beeger 'n as you ketch-a them off the w'arf. Ef you come to-morrow, me, I tek care of you."

The familiar face and pleasant voice quite reassured Minnie. She sucked down her expiring sobs by applying the hem of her skirt to her mouth.

"All right. I'll ask mamma—I'll come, anyway," she added hastily, "'cause mamma likes me to ketch halibuts."

The play by this time varied so widely from its original method, Cuby set it back into the channel with a dash of her own.

"Go you down," she exhorted her latest comforter, kindly and firmly, and as the sprite vanished Cuby recollected her woes magnificently.

"Is there none, none," she cried, "that may halp me in my so deso-olate'? Ah, woe iss to me; naught—

naught can assweg' my griff but the dar-r-k passage to the tomb."

Cuby was tremendous, her voice and manner wonderful. I admired her without question, where I sat; and as her eyes, after a fresh dab from her handkerchief, glanced my way, I smiled my marveling applause.

"Grief" gave me a composed, almost undiscoverable wink, clear to me alone; such was her art, it affected not at all the tragic melodrama of her features; and she continued superbly:

"C'iss, c'iss, to pile upon me the v'en and goddy masses of your floral off'rings," she admonished the empty stage. "C'iss to mek trouble me with your v'en words of console'," she said, throwing up her hands in piteous appeal against the tidy lot of comforters that were failing altogether to put in an appearance.

But Rhody Ditmarse had a part to do. She had been supplied with a hat from some source—I suspected her adorer, Rob—fit to make her eligible for select and solemn occasions like the present; and her little soul was full of business. For a week past she had been curing up the warts on her tough little hands by the approved methods known to Power Lot: that is, she had split a bean and rubbed it over the afflicted members and then buried it safe away under a rock. Some, less conscientious, did the infected bean up in a neat package and left it by the roadside, whereupon the one who innocently picked it up transferred the wart to his own person. Rhody's tried and stout little heart revolted at the thought of bringing any fresh calamity

upon the already overburdened and suffering human race. Her bean was immune from working further ill.

So here she was, with a Sunday equipment by way of raiment, and receding warts; one of the epitomes of consolation who in due course was to approach "Grief," erstwhile known as Cuby Tee-bo, with flowers and a text.

It was not properly Rhody's turn, but the flag of distress having been hoisted in behalf of the other comforters, she accepted without question the duty devolving prematurely upon her. Being sharp and quick of memory, she had also assimilated as many of the lost texts as possible with their accompanying bouquets; and thus with intellect and body both weighted after the similitude of a packhorse, she stepped sturdily up on to the platform. Her dress, demurely long for a child of her years, revealed only the strong foundations of some cowhide shoes, which tramped across the stage toward Cuby with the fearless and unrelenting tread of Retribution itself.

" 'Thessalony'—'Psa'ms'—'Coronations,' " grimly did Rhody, with a citation of the proper authority in every instance, deliver one text after another into the light and inattentive ear of "Grief." "Grief" wearied of the monologue. A speech of her own had been for some time due, and she now interpolated the same without hesitation.

"Biggone," said the sorrow-enthroned lady, fixing upon Rhody a look of weary disgust. "Biggone. Thou who would-est assweg' my griff, you mek me worser—you mek me *seeck*," she added daringly on her own account, and she yawned—for Cuby was healthy and

a regular sleeper, and the steady drone of Rhody's voice was soporific.

"You are not to 'Biggone' me, Cuby Tee-bo," answered Rhody sternly. "Them that you was to say 'Biggone' to has all giv' out. They won't come up, and I'm a-doin' of it all; and you got ter get comforted on me, an' boo-hoo an' repent, the way it is in the book."

Cuby stared blankly at the unalterable severity—from what strain of Puritan ancestry, who knows?—cast upon little Rhody's features. But with a flash of Latin adaptability, "Grief" triumphed, and still carried off the situation at last with glory.

"So they come no more, Rhode'?" she said gently, with a soft sigh of satisfaction.

"You got ter git comforted on me," repeated Rhody.

"My griff," now readily assented Cuby sweetly and clearly, with splendid action, "my griff is all assweg'. Your floral off'rings, your so swi't words from the Holee Babble have lift' me up to mek of me a joy so beeg as once was my so gre't griff. I bless-a an' cariss-a you all, and will now retire to my apart-a-mong to give t'anks for all w'at is on me."

Cuby rose, and sailed with a chastened, though supreme, majesty from the stage.

Her performance was regarded as something transcendent throughout. Other numbers of the evening's programme, assumed by some of the maturer members of the Sunday-school, followed; but they appeared trite, they lacked salt and savor altogether, after what had been.

When a little girl, whom you have seen wading barefoot among the clam flats, or halloing like a boy at you from some perch in the tree branches, suddenly sails superbly before you, long and willowy in black robes, a Madonna sweetness upon her features, a faultless self-possession in her bearing—it sets you to wondering how it all came about. The toss of Cuby's head at the congratulations she received, as she reappeared brilliant in her accustomed beribboned garb among the audience, did not detract from this marvel.

As for Rhody, she was accepted by the whole Sunday-school, youth and old, as a stalwart and promising pillar miraculously supplied to a decaying tabernacle. She went back to the bench where Rob sat with Mrs. Skipper and Caroline. Rob's welcoming smile was genial as the sun at noonday and expressed so much pride of Rhody that she blushed slightly herself for vanity of her performance—for the first and only time that evening.

But I was watching closely another face that had but just entered, in a dim corner of the hall; a face that was staring at Rob Hilton with a sort of fixed horror.

On that night when I brought Rob home from Waldeck I had asked Mary if Bate was in the house. "No," she said; "Bate has not been here for two nights, Jim."

Rob and I had landed late at night. No one had seen us, and Rob with his inflamed arm had not been out since until this evening. So I doubted if any word of Rob, living, had reached Bate.

I made my way quietly down to where he stood.

"Come on out, Bate," I said. "I want a word with you."

My voice seemed to rouse him from the shackles of a nightmare. He followed me out stupidly. He had on a new suit of clothes, with a fine linen shirt, and a watch and chain, and new boots to match, and he was holding a big cigar in his terror-palsied hand.

I believe I have never seen anything so pathetic under heaven as the new clothes on that shivering, convicted wretch. Innocence and martyrdom are not so pathetic to me; they have strong white wings that earthly mischance only set free for the upper kingdoms and an incontrovertible estate—but the idiocy of evil, sucking still rapaciously from the dregs of a poisoned glass, God must mend that, as there are some bodies beyond the skill of earthly physicians to set straight. God, He will mend all; that I believe. You have your notion of pathos, I have mine; and to me Bate Stingaree was pathetic, beyond tears, to what wrings a man's very soul.

But I had to look out for his not following and persecuting Rob any further. I had to put chain and muzzle on him, so to speak, and I went straight to my job.

"Bate," I said, "you and Gar' Tee-bo sailed over to Waldeck after us. I know just where you got your boat, I know just the spot where you anchored out of sight; and you sneaked in your dory off the ledges and went ashore, and watched your chance. You felled Rob Hilton in a flash, creeping up behind him like a snake, in a dark alleyway. You took his money and threw him over for dead into the quarry."

Bate gave me a demented grin; then, as if my words

had roused him to some force for self-defense in the living world again, his eyes glared at me like those of a beast, his hands twitched as though he could not withhold a blow.

"You," he cried, "mind your business, or I'll——"

"Hand me over what you have left of Rob's money," said I, still even and low, "unless you want to serve out a sentence in prison. I've got to keep an eye on you hereafter, and I shan't fail to do it. It is 'toe-the-mark' or prison for you, Bate. And be quick about what I tell you to do. You don't want to get a crowd out here."

"It's a lie, Jim," said he desperately; "somebody's been tellin' you a lie. Daisy got drunk as a fool, and fell over of his own accord. Tee-bo and me went over on business, and we can prove it; and we happened to see him stumblin' and reelin' along the quarrryside, drunk; we said then he'd likely fall over. That's all we got to do with it."

"Rob Hilton *saw* the hand that dealt the blow," I informed him, rather impatiently. "And what if I, being an old stager and knowing the ways of a few o' the folks—thank Heaven, there's only a few o' that sort 'round here—what if I arranged to have some of those bills *marked* that went into Rob's pocket, and that you've got now in your own?"

"D—n it," said the craven fellow, "I never had no luck. Everything and everybody's down on me."

"Hand me over the money," said I.

"I didn't have but half of it," he whined.

"I know where to get the other half."

Bate, without further parley, handed to me the fifty

dollars he had left. "You're goin' to let this thing drop, now, Jim?" he was trembling, and actually tried to work up an ingratiating smile on his pallid face.

"That's just the trouble," I said. "Somehow everything has to be let drop with you. As you say, you ain't been kindly treated, but it ain't in the way you think. Punishment has been warded off o' you when it might 'a' saved your soul alive to let the chastisement fall hard on your back. You've been shielded when you ought to been made to face the light. I'm a-doin' you and all humanity 'round ye another wrong now, by lettin' ye go. But I can't stand letting such a blow fall on that sister o' yours—on Mary."

His face fixed for a sneer from very habit, but he hastened to draw it out respectfully.

"She's a good girl, Mary is," he whined. "I reckon as how some things might *kill* her. All right, we'll let it drop. You needn't be afraid I'll trouble any of ye any more."

My next business was with Tee-bo. I recovered a full hundred there, and obsequious treatment.

"Bate—he nevaire tell-a me what for he sail to Waldeck. No. I des-spise heem, an' I *keel*-a heem, eef you weesh. Bate—he mek his invite' to go sail with heem. So I go. I know not'ings. He say 'Man owe me money, w'at he pe'd me—I giv' you hunder' dollar, Gar', 'cause I loaf Cuby, eef you git her to mek marry with me.' I know not'ings, Capataine Jeem. I loaf you. I do w'at you say, only don't you come to mek troubles on me. I tell you, I know not'ings."

CHAPTER XXIV

SEA GULLS EMBRACE

I TOOK the story of the refunded money up to Rob next morning. "You owe me only 'fifty' now," I said.

"I owe you——" said the lad; well, I won't tell what he said. But it isn't so hard giving up, and piloting your chickens along to pick up the fattest of the corn, when they turn a face and a spirit toward you like Rob's.

I was willing to make my faith in Gar' Tee-bo's protestations of innocence discretionary, but I was determined to find out whether "Grief" knew anything of the dastardly plot against Rob. I meant to search that maiden's soul for lurking crime. On my return to the River settlement I came easily upon Cuby, fresh and handsome, doing the week's washing in the shed of the Tee-bo cabin.

"How d' do, Cuby?"

"Halloo, Jeem."

"You did your part mighty fine last night, Cuby—wonderful. You are an actress and no mistake."

"Wal'," said Cuby, deftly wringing out one of Tee-bo's flannel shirts, a deep blush on her downcast face, "I'm vary glad you lak' how I done it."

"By the way, Cuby," I continued bluntly, "did you know that your father and Bate sailed over to Wal-deck just after Rob and I did the other day?"

"So?—Jeem," she said, lifting to me a pale face that I knew on the spot and the instant to be an honest face. "They mek to me as how they go feeshin'."

"Do you—honest—care anything about Rob Hilton, Cuby? Tell me now."

"Me—I want them not to hurt heem. I am good, Jeem Tur-ban, though always you hate me and mek a mock at me." She shook out the wrung garment viciously, as though she would have liked to slap me in the face with it. But her voice and eyes carried a suspicion of dammed-up tears.

"I see you do care for him, after all," said I.

"Heem!" She threw the wrung and shaken garment to a near-by line; it snapped my ear stingingly in passing, but it landed on the line as smartly as if a boy had thrown it. "Heem, the gre't stupeed lunk-a-head. Heem! Loaf heem!" She laughed, and her perfect teeth glittered in a way that actually suggested to me that their bite might not be pleasant.

"Who do you love, then?" I said.

"Who? Oh, *you*, mebbie," she retorted, her eyes burning annihilation of me, her passionate face white with wrath. "You! That is it! It must be. How could it be halp'? You air so han'some, so genteel, so loafly—an' you mek so to mind your own beezness! Oh, vary sure it must-a be you!" She laughed, and her laugh was musical even when she was in a spasm of scorn and rage.

"That is not polite," I answered, as if I had been deeply hurt, "to remind me of my misfortunes. I did not think you would be so unkind to a man who was created plain and rough; to throw his ugliness

back in his face, and laugh at it. I did not think it of you, Cuby."

She burst into tears.

"Oh, Jeem, it is not me w'at laugh at you. It is you mek-a laugh on me."

She bent over her tub again, and her tears mingled with the suds, falling over cheeks dewy as a baby's and from long, dark lashes that hid sedulously the storm of shame and sorrow in her eyes. Now was she indeed "Grief"; and still the actress was mounting in her, her lip began to curl and the clothes in the tub to dance a jig suggestive of rising passion.

"Well, who do you *hate*, Cuby?" I made haste to say, by way of deflecting her emotion into some safe and congenial outlet.

"Jeem, I cross-a my heart"—she performed that action solemnly, her bright, wet eyes meeting mine steadily—"I am getting hate of them two."

"Ah, your father and Bate?"

"Hush!—yes. I am getting hate to be 'round here. They dreenk—awful. They fetch home a lot of the dreenk, that tam' they mek' to go feeshin'. Jeem, tell-a me, where was it they go?—an' they fight on Rob? An' heem one poor lunk-a-head."

"Rob Hilton is brave enough to distinguish himself in any war men ever fought, Cuby. Rob is more of a soldier than you think."

"Keep you heem, then. I want heem not. I want nevaire to go up on that hill an' have that Ma'y Sting'ree runnin' in and makin' a preach at me. Me—I rather to die."

"Then, maybe you love Bate?"

"Mebbee you are a fool," she retorted, the stout pillow case she had been wringing clearing my head by the fraction of an inch on its impetuous way to the line. "Bet' Sting'ree!—be tam to heem!—w'at have the audass' to knock me 'gin the side o' my house, till I draw the gun on heem, an' he run. Would I shoot, look you! By tam, I would shoot heem!"

The tears were decidedly exhaling in the bright flame of Cuby's eyes.

"Well, now, look here," I said, unable to keep back a smile, her oaths were so incongruous with her baby-sweet lips; "look here, Cuby, you and me are old friends—and you know who's to be trusted. Old Jim Turbine will keep your secret. You are afraid to stay here——"

"I did not say I was afre'd."

"True, but you hate the atmosphere round your home here. You hate them, and you'd be glad to get away and get quit of it all. And so many of the boys round here have been trying to pay court to you. Sure, you love someone. Who is it, Cuby?"

"Whan I tell heem," she replied, with bitter emphasis, "his old greezle-top 'll be layin' more years than as one in the tomb o' the daid folks," and the mate to the pillow case took me a clean swat across the eyes, and there stayed, wet and heavy.

I laughed as I disentangled myself. Cuby laughed, giving me a sidelong glance from her viciously renewed exercises over the washtub.

"I thought you could throw," I reproached her; "but you are like all girls, silly and weak." I sighed and took the doughty pillow-case over to the line, where

I hung it up neatly with clothespins; in the same manner I suspended all the articles that had been hurled thitherward with such force by Cuby, not omitting the kitchen towel, which took me ferociously in the neck while I was in the very midst of these travails.

"Do you know what 'spunk' means?" I said, coming back to Cuby.

"It means," she answered promptly, "that I am brev'."

"It does so. All of that. You can go right up to the head."

"Ah no, Jeem, I go furdur 'n as that. My mother, she went an' drown herself long tam' ago biffore I rimmember, but they tell-a me. She was brev'. Whan she lak' it not to leeve any longer, she go sweem out—vary far—where there is no trouble to her any more. Ah, she was brev', an' me—I care not. I am brev' also; an' I loaf-a the water. It mak' me happy to sweem out vary, vary far, an' nevaire come back where it is all trouble to me, an' some—that I did once lak'—come an' mek' a laugh at me."

"You love the water? So do I. You ought to marry one of the sailor lads, Cuby."

"I shall nevaire marry," replied Cuby. "I use to theenk eef I did to marry it mus' be a man w'at has a boat an' goes a-feeshin'. I could not loaf any other—me. But I shall nevaire marry."

"There's Bingham Teazler, for one, says he asked ye twice over last time his boat was in," said I rather harshly; for I resented the look of composed martyrdom that had suddenly spread itself over Cuby's capricious and beautiful features.

"Is it your beezness, Jeem," inquired Cuby sweetly, "to go aroun' tellin' folks who they shall to marry? I thought you had a boat and went a-feeshin'. I did not know you had change' your beezness. Me—I should theenk you would be a-shem' of yourself to go aroun' on such beezness, lak' a ol' hen, fooss, fooss, fooss——"

"My business is sailing and fishing still. Only once in a while there's a little devil of a wildcat ashore that is more than old hens can manage; she needs a big man to train her. She's a vixen and a torment, and a whole handful. I've got more folks to look after and more things on my hands now than I know what to do with. But here's another—a 'married' woman, too—that ought to be behaving herself respectably."

Cuby laughed.

"Married! I would tell anybody go mind their beezness eef I was married to tham only so leetle as I am married to Rob Heelton. Get away, you, from my father's house. You are stupeed. You have no bre'ns. It is a peety, for somtam' I theenk I lak' you—it is a peety God have giv' you no bre'ns."

"Well, you have got to promise me one thing before I leave here; you won't go drowning yourself or swimming out too far, you little she-devil? I know you will keep it if you promise. Now look me straight in the eyes—will you promise?"

"Get away from my father's house, and go you mind your beezness. For I will not promise you not'ing—no, I will not."

"Promise," I said, striding toward her, and I took



"PROMISE," I SAID, STRIDING TOWARD HER.



both her hands, holding her at arm's length. The little hands were helpless in mine.

Her fearless, wild eyes smiled at me.

I never knew just how it was done, but in that instant I held her at arm's length no longer. I held her in my arms, and I kissed her with a fierce will on her sweet, rebellious lips.

"Promise me, Cuby."

"Jeem, I promise-a you," she said.

CHAPTER XXV

SCARECROW AS COMFORTER

WHEN a man starts out to take more interest in other folks than he does in himself, he's got business before him, and plenty of it; orders to fill by day and by night, and no dull times in his profession.

It's a profession for a particular kind of fool, that's built that way, and it's never overcrowded; the air is fresh all 'round ye, and nothing to obstruct the view—when ye take to running the universe for the sake of other folks.

Mary, on her part, was running the universe to try to save Bate, and she wondered and worried over his continued absence from home.

"But he has done better of late, Jim. Much of the time he has worked faithfully on the place. His crop of corn is the best anywhere about—so they say. Perhaps—he has gone so long without—this will be his last 'spree.' If I could only get him home again. Don't you think that he has done better for a good while past?"

"Well, yes," I answered desperately, "I think he has done *more*."

"You won't give him up, Jim? I could not work still to redeem him—without your help."

Now, I had kissed Cuby as a gull in gay and chatty flight leans to his companion on the wing. But Mary

—that adoration of her was a life-long habit—I should never kiss her; that I knew, though she lifted to me the soul in her dark eyes with a trust that rived me, for the love I had for her, and had nurtured for her, against hope, this many a year. Verily, there are some seas a woman like that does not sail, or she would not have lifted to me a look like that, who must only suffer through my love for her.

“I’ll never give up aught that I can do to help you. Did you need to ask me that?” I smiled at her.

Rob, with his able arm, was rigging up a scarecrow—over in the corn field where I went to work—to keep the crows away from Bate’s corn. He arranged a decayed hat at a defiant angle on the head of the dreadful creation he was producing. “This is just fit business for me,” he declared, “some one-handed fool job like this.”

“It’s not so bad, considering,” said I, “trying to keep the crows off the corn of a man that tried to—murder you.”

“I’ve got the habit of working at something all the time, Jim,” he went on seriously, “and it is all I’m fit for. I’d better be working than making an ass of myself on high lines, like trying to read Shakespeare and Browning aloud to a woman college president. Did you hear me trying to read aloud to Mary? I wish I had at least a little decent fear, but I’m such a d—d fool I don’t stick at anything.”

“Rob,” I suggested, to turn his thoughts, “you ought to put the hat that Caroline Treet gave you on that scarecrow. It would not be matched then for a success, of its kind, in any kingdom. The crows

wouldn't so much as flutter anywheres near all summer."

Rob's shoulders shrugged with a laugh. I saw, though his back was turned. Then he faced me, and there was the queer spirit that I liked so, and that always floored me, in his blue eyes. You couldn't controvert it or touch it anywhere, it was that steady and deep, though it was only over a little thing that it showed, now.

"Jim, I wouldn't put that hat on a scarecrow for any money, or anything on God's earth. I wouldn't make game of that hat though it was worn to shreds—and I know some 'round here do put Caroline's hats on their scarecrows. I wear it often—when she's looking—and I shall as long as I'm at Power Lot, God Help Us. It's a nice hat, and I like it. You keep quiet about that hat, old man, or you and I'll have a quarrel."

"You've got a good many girls on your string," I adjured him solemnly.

The smile grew broad on his face. Then he sobered.

"Ah, Jim," he said, arranging some straw under the tattered vest of his dreadful piece of sculpture in order to give it the similitude of a mortal stomach and some proper pride of bearing; "ah, Jim, you ought to have been in my shoes—at birth, I mean—you would have plodded into the advantages that I tossed in air; you would have used them like an expert, and made a great man of yourself, and—married Mary Stingaree."

He became intensely interested in the processes of the art he was pursuing, and stood off to view his uncanny work.

"Mary Stingaree is for neither you nor me," I said. "It would be a shame for her to marry either of us, after all. We both know she is spoken for from a high source, and where she will probably make up her mind to go in the end. We'd better put her out of our minds as far as that is concerned."

"Doctor Margate is too old for her," Rob replied, giving an English cant to the trousers set up on two old broom handles which constituted the legs of his masterpiece. "Too old for her. Perhaps you think she's sort of prim and schoolteachery, Jim, but she isn't. She's great! She's jolly and full of 'go'—didn't you know that? Why, Mary Stingaree is a society woman more than anything else, and a brilliant one, too. She has had a hard, uncongenial life of it, but the music and the dash are all there. She ought to marry a young man, and travel, and entertain at her own house, and all that sort of thing. How she would shine!"

"Doctor Margate is not too old to travel, and by all accounts his house is big enough for even her to shine in. You and I are poor devils with our own work cut out before us, and we've got to stand up to it without frittering our thoughts away in hopeless moonshine. We can be men she can respect, anyway."

"Yes," said Rob, his face settling again to severer lines, with a sharp pallor round the lips. "I can't hang 'round there so much with her, though. I—I like it too much, Jim. I—I wouldn't have dreamed, when I first came to Power Lot, God Help Us, that a man could ever love a woman as I love her now. When *she* does up my arm I don't dare breathe, for fear she'd

know how I wish that I could die when she touches me, and go off that way, happy, in the bliss of it; quit it all, that way—all this mess that I've got into, that I don't rightly know how to manage. I'm not *afraid*, old man. I could stand up to anything, if I saw my way clear. Once or twice I've thought she—Mary—well, I could not believe it, of course—but I've thought—just for a moment, you know—I've thought——”

“Don't think it any more—that's only just her way. You get to thinking that, too hard, and you fall on your head every time, and find you're badly cracked. Stand on your own feet, Rob. Good Lord! stand up independent, and steer.”

“You couldn't talk just like that, if you cared for anybody as I care for her.”

“No?—but it's a safe rule to go by. It's the only way she'd ever care for *you*.”

I pitied the lad's working face. But he climbed out of this quarry before my very eyes. You can tell by the look on a man's face when he has given up his own way and settled down again to sail as true to chart and compass as he knows.

I left him smoking his pipe beside his scarecrow, friendly, and human-close, as though the communion lay deep between him and that uncanny offspring of his genius. I stopped at the house on my way home for a word with Mary. There are lots of ends to pick up when you are running the universe for the sake of a lot of eccentric individuals such as I had to manage.

“This is just between you and me as old friends,

Mary," said I. "You might go kind of careful with Rob Hilton, if you don't really care anything about him. He—he's very fond of you, Mary."

"Is he?" said she, meeting me very frankly, and with great quietness of demeanor. "Well—I am fond of him."

"Oh, yes; I know. But that is not the way Rob feels it. He is deeper than you think. He—he—it is tough for *Rob*, Mary. It's hard—it's vital hard for *him*."

"And how do you suppose I care for him? Am I incapable of affection for any sort except drunkards and the superannuated and all the curious of creation? Is it not possible that I could love someone young and straight and tall and pleasant to look upon, and joyful to hear? Someone who has erred, possibly—like the rest of us; for we are none of us quite perfect, Jim."

She flashed that at me as though I'd been sizing up poor human flesh and condemning it altogether because it didn't touch ideal attainment; that is the kind of justice you get meted out to you when you're running the universe—your little part of it—for the sake of a lot of hotheads.

"Is it not possible that I might care for someone who is admirably, simply normal in his nature and in his craving for happiness?"

She was up and speaking at last. Not so much her words as her manner glued my tongue in my mouth.

"It was a shame," she went on, in a flame of indignation, "a shame for Rob Hilton to be entrapped into that dreadful, false marriage down there. He was

not married," she believed. "He was not of their sort, and he could never become so through any amount of degradation. It was wicked. If there had been anyone to take any interest in him——"

"A woman," she continued, "could not go rummaging about in the purlieus of that dreadful River down there to see what was going on, or to protect the defenseless; but it really seemed as though a man could have protected his friend."

My tongue still stuck tight on unmoving hinges.

"I said Rob Hilton was charmingly normal," said she. "He is not, he is superior. Why, he has a heart like a lion. *He* would do and dare anything for anyone he loved."

"Mary," said my creaking tongue at last, and I climbed a tough pitch in the waves then, and swallowed injustice, and threw back magnanimity and patience at her for her wild, cruel handling of me, God knows that; "Mary, if I have not been all the friend I ought to be to you and Rob Hilton, why, I shall have a chance to make up for it later on."

She hesitated, and gave me a bit of attention, just a bit. I reckon my face was screwed up in some distorted shape.

"Jim," said she softer, "I did not mean that. There was never anyone like you. I did not mean to hurt you."

"Never mind," said I, "I'm one of the 'curious'—one of the freaks. But now, I want to know one thing, if an old life-long friendship may put the question to ye, Mary. If Rob Hilton were proven to be free, would *you* marry him?"

"You seem to cast some reflection upon him," she answered; "and the question you ask me would be impertinent—did it come from anyone but you. But you seem to cast some reflection upon Rob," she said, very gently now. "Did you never think, Jim, it is greater to win a battle over self and temptation than to sit at ease with those who have not been tempted?"

"I have thought—a good deal, Mary," I said.

"I know you have. But you seem not to have thought of that. No woman of character could despise Rob Hilton and his splendid fight."

"I believe that you would marry him," I murmured aloud, a sort of helpless incredulity in my tone.

"I do not know," she said. "This much is certain"—she punished me with the new light that shone wide and soft in her glorious eyes—"I do not believe that I could bear to marry anyone else."

So the die was cast, the song was sung, the word was said. I retreated, I do not know how, except that I stalked away automatically, as a man whose life-springs are dead.

Rob had finished his pipe, and left the scarecrow standing solitary. The gatepost was conveniently near. I leaned against it for support, and as I did so I could feel the rags of the crow-frightener's right arm fluttering caressingly against my cheek.

Some things rose very clearly before me then: how Mary had chosen Power Lot, God Help Us, up here with the wind for a watchdog, had accepted it deliberately, rather than a softer life, for Duty's sake. How barren a life it had been for her, into which Rob had come with his brightness and theatrical position

of dependence, with his qualities of eternal youth and his spectacular fight against temptation.

"But she was all the world to me," I blurted out, clenching my hard fists in a kind of agony, being alone with the scarecrow. "Deep down in my heart I was always thinking that perhaps somehow, sometime——

"But she loves him—she loves Rob Hilton." I brought myself up standing. "The story's told, the dream's over. There's nothing left but to 'Steer right on.' That is all the story now."

"There's a storm brewing in the east," shivered Scarecrow.

"The more storm the better," said I. "I like storms. When a poor devil's stripped of everything else in the world he's got the storms left, anyway. Give me a storm and a boat and *I'm* all right."

"Other folks? Other folks?" screeched Scarecrow, the wind wrenching the hat clean off his head.

"Oh, all right," said I, capping him again. "Yes, other folks. Well, I'll do my best. If *that's* the way to ride the gale out, I'll go that way." My own words came back to me, spoken though they had been with a gush of blood at the heart—"Mary, if I have not been all the friend I ought to be to you and Rob Hilton, why, I shall have a chance to make up for it later on." Aye, and so I will. I'll clear a way for them somehow. That's settled."

I saw old man Trawles coming home along the lane, driving his cow, and I, not being in the mood to be seen or to chat with him, jumped over into the tall corn so that he might not discover me.

Jacob Trawles wore his tall hat, as usual, and swung

his cane. The cow stopped and gazed fearfully at Scarecrow standing crazily bold in his rags by the gatepost.

"Sir," said Jacob Trawles in his best urban style to Scarecrow, whose features and tatters he discerned but vaguely from where he stood; "sir, will you kindly step aside till I have passed with my cow?"

Poor Scarecrow whistled through all his shackling constitution, and twirled his own rakish hat with his hidden brows in sniggering contempt of Jacob's supplication.

"Sir," said Jacob to Scarecrow with severe dignity, "step aside at once, sir; you are frightening my cow."

I held my breath in a spasm of interest and attention, lest I should shriek aloud even as the gay wind shrieked. Scarecrow rattled, waved, and whistled in jaunty defiance, and the cow turned and plunged in frenzied retreat.

"Sir," Jacob sternly accused the insensate tatterdemalion by the gatepost, "sir, I requested you, with courtesy, to step aside. No gentleman, no decent person, sir, would conduct himself as you are doing."

Poor Scarecrow shook his hoe-handle right arm in a tiltish way, as full of glad menace and challenge to approach.

Now I saw that Jacob Trawles did not essentially lack for courage.

"D—n your impudence!" cried the insulted old man, advancing upon Scarecrow with upraised cane and whirling it over that unshrinking creature's hat, scathless, for he had no mind to commit murder. It

was when he had cooled down enough to prod his unspeakable enemy persistently in the stomach with his cane that Scarecrow yielded up, unregretfully, his brief reign on earth, and fell in astonishing distintegration at his assailant's feet.

"What in the devil's almanack!" cried the startled old man—an excessive oath which he used only on state occasions like the present. "What in the——"

In the general collapse of material before him, the familiar aspect of old broom and rake handles, laths, straw, old garments, and a battered hat sped from a headless trunk, reassured him and advised him of the nature of the opponent whom he had so valiantly attacked.

"Now who played that trick, I wonder," he commented aloud, with a bitter inflection of contempt for the wit of the perpetrator; "some lorn shif'less fool 't didn't know no more 'n to rig up a scarecrow right here where everybody's cows is passin'. If I ketch him, I'll——"

He wiped his brow, looked long and cautiously about him to make sure that no one had witnessed the remarkable scene, and then started back down the lane in pursuit of his cow.

I collected the shattered framework and constitution of what had been so late my companion in misery, picked up his forlorn garments, transported him a piece, and set him up to what I trusted might be a long and useful existence in the center of the field. By chance, as I was making my exit from the tall and tangled corn, I came face to face with Jacob Trawles returning with his cow.

I was conscious on the instant that I colored high and leered guiltily in his face.

"Jim Turbine," said he, relapsing wholly into the vernacular, "ain't you gittin' to be purty old to be playin' that kind o' harf-witted, dodderin', aimless, shif'less tricks on folks?"

I felt that I was leering only the more broadly into his questioning face.

"Wal', wal'," said he, fixing me with his dun-brown eye, "you keep your mouth shet, Jim, and I'll keep mine. Ha, ha!" he laughed with an artificiality in which the effort involved was something painful to hear, "boys will be boys, Jim. Yes, boys will be boys. I—ahem—I shall invite you to my wedding, Jim."

I accepted his cajolery without resentment. "Aimless, shif'less," he had called me; and, faith, but I had been hoeing out the corn of my enemy, for charity's sake, till every bone in my body ached.

Sure, a man gathers up sweet plums of appreciation and reward when he's running his little universe for the sake of other folks.

"Did ye hear, Jim? You keep your mouth shet, and I'll keep mine. I'm a-goin' to invite ye to my weddin', Jim," Old man Trawles beamed on me.

"Thank ye, I'll come, sure, if I'm ashore, Jacob. I'm a master hand at going to other folks' weddings."

Maybe too much storm and wind and general catastrophe was mingled with my appointed voyage through life for grief to stay me long at any one point. There was always the next wave to face.

CHAPTER XXVI

“AS FAR AS HEAVEN”

A WEEK had passed and Bate had not yet returned. Mary's forebodings, if the truth were known, were not only for him, but also for fear of tidings of some criminal misdoing of his, or lest he should come home drunk and violent by night with she knew not what evil companions. Mrs. Byjo stepped out strong as ever in this emergency.

“I'm coming over to bunk on the lounge alongside your bed, Mary. When they was mixin' the mortar to make me up, they hadn't a drop o' 'Fear' to put in, by Jo! Fear's a mighty good thing, but they was out of it; so, while the devil was gone to town to git some, they finished the job o' making me without any. It ain't a safe way to be constituted, I suppose, but it's mighty comfortable.” She swaggered cheerily about the kitchen and set her constant friend, the oxwhip, staunchly in a corner.

Mary laughed in sympathy with the broad kindness and courage on Mrs. Byjo's face. It was plain to see the relief on Mary's own face, that had been growing darkly haggard of late—more irresistibly beautiful than ever to poor Rob.

“Rob ain't got but one arm at present,” continued Mrs. Byjo; “so me and my old oxwhip will stand guard, too.”

She took a big pair of spectacles out of her pocket

and sat down by the kitchen lamp with one of Mary's books. “You two young people can have the sitting-room table for your reading,” she said, “and clear out o' here. When I read I don't want anybody interruptin' me with talk, or jogglin' my elbows; I want the whole world to myself when I read, same as when I'm enjoyin' my first mess o' greens in the spring, only more so.”

Mary's face was brighter than it had been for days. She felt freer to converse with Rob of what was on her heart, and she spoke to him in the adjoining room.

“I want you to be frank with me, if there is anything concealed about that day at Waldeck, Rob. Did—did Bate sail over there too? I have been thinking lately—he was not at home that day.”

“Miss Stingaree,” said Rob, smiling in his ingenuous way, “it isn't hardly fair, is it, to ask me about Bate? He sails and he tramps so *many* ways—how should I know?”

“I've had a horrid suspicion haunting me, until Virginia came in and dispelled *all* suspicions with her brave good-cheer, that—that, possibly, it was Bate who was the means of your falling into the quarry?” She was looking at Rob more keenly than he realized.

He laughed, and laughed again, with the humor of the idea.

“Miss Stingaree, I have been able to defend myself against Bate for some time. You know that. You are not very flattering. It was the turn of my foot on a miserable stone sent me slipping down there. The fall was unexpectedly abrupt, and there were jagged rocks below.”

"Rob, I believe that is the first lie you ever told me. You and Jim might have agreed on the same story, at least. He said the bank caved in. What *did* happen? I want to know the truth."

Rob's smiling features were expressive of the utmost bewilderment and confusion. "If Jim said the bank caved, why then, that was it. I was so stunned, you know."

"You weren't stunned before the bank caved in, were you?"

"No, oh no, not at all; but the things that happened just before did not make so much impression on me, or rather, the impression was sort of lost, you understand—I think it is usual in such cases. But I can tell you this, truly—if Bate Stingaree pushed me over into the quarry, then I wasn't alive and knowing when he did it, that's all!"

Rob's forehead bloomed with frankness. Mary caught at his words eagerly with a sudden revulsion of feeling, believing what she was agonizingly anxious to believe that her brother had not taken that dastardly attempt at crime upon his soul.

"If Bate had only—would only—put himself in training as you have done," she said. "Your abstinence, I mean, and—and perfectly marvelous faithfulness of application. Rob, do you know of any way one could get hold of Bate really to influence him? You are 'intuitive.'" She smiled. "Now I have been called 'scholarly,' here and there. I have a fair idea of perspective and logical sequences and values, to 'see all 'round a thing,' as they say here; but you—on occasion—you see as far as heaven, Rob. *You saw*

my mother go. I shall never forget that. I should never have seen her go.”

The woman's words were soft as music, the trembling of her lips inexpressibly tender. Rob realized of a sudden that Mary did not wholly disapprove of him, that she had even entertained a thought of him in the sanctuary of her tenderest emotions; he drank some of the astounding flattery of her words. His weary, hopeless heart proceeded to make eternity of this moment. Past and future were void; his senses swam in poignant ecstasy. He felt that he must say something to keep her still near him, not to appear as vacuous before her, however deliciously light his head was perched upon his neck, so airy and fine that it was no more trouble to him than the head of a sparrow.

“That was a great dream,” he said, “that about your mother; and I'm not usually much of a dreamer, either.”

“Rob, how can I get hold of Bate? Can you tell me?”

She followed one hope persistently, but there was the trace of girlish emotion still trembling on her lips; and there were her wonderful witch-dark eyes asking *him* for advice and aid.

“Perhaps,” he said with absolute honesty, the moment was so transcendent, “if he *cared* enough for someone to want to win their respect though he died doing it—I believe I'll tell you something, Miss Stingaree; since it is all a hopeless business for me, you won't mind now, I believe, if I tell you. You must not feel that you are unkind. It was a good thing, so don't you worry; but it hit—hard as death.”

"Do go on, Rob," said Mary, much wondering.

"Since it is all a hopeless business for me, and I have not even any right, I suppose, to tell you how much I began to think about you at one time; in fact, I thought about you every blessed minute of the time. A fellow could not help it, you know. Well, I wandered up to the old church one evening—what they call 'Spook House'—and lo and behold! you and Jim were standing over in front of it talking together, and it came back through the old broken windows to me where I stood, and before I could turn away you were speaking of me and you said: 'He is not a man at all!' That is what you said," concluded Rob with half-averted face, on which strength and dignity mingled with a world of ardent adoration, not to speak of forgiveness, if forgiveness were required for those soul-biting words.

Mary's cheek was streaked with so dark a red as though a sudden arrow had been sent to her heart.

"After that," Rob went on, "I did not care about drink, or pleasure, or anything; at first, I did not even care about *you*. It stopped every hope of the living in me. It killed me. It drove me"—Rob's face settled to its sterner lines, and his voice grew tense and deep—"it drove me, when I was able to pick myself up on to my feet once more, to a resolution that was bigger than all things else in my eyes. I vowed that I would stand alone, and do the right thing, whether anybody knew it or not, or loved me or not; that I'd be a man to suit my own ideals on the subject, which are as high as yours, perhaps; though I haven't got far on the road yet, but, God knows, I've been trying—some."

Mary's voice was like the soft, clear tone of a flute; it seemed angelic, but heartless, to Rob.

“You think, if Bate could care really to win some one's respect, or—hear some very harsh words about himself—it might redeem him?”

“I don't know,” said Rob drearily. Then he lifted his head again. “I'll do all in mortal power to help you with your brother, Miss Stingaree.”

“How would it be, generally speaking, in a case like that you have described to me,” Mary's clear, flute-like, impersonal tone went on, “after hearing so unkind, thoughtless, and—exaggerated a criticism of himself; though entirely forgiving, perhaps, out of a great nature, a person would never care as before for one who had uttered such unfortunate words?”

“They were not unfortunate, after all, perhaps,” exclaimed Rob generously, quite off his guard; “though they knocked a fellow down, when he got on his feet he had his jaws set for good, you know; he had his mind made up, and he wouldn't have stuck at going through hell itself to carry out his resolution. Don't you see?”

“Yes, I see,”—Mary smiled with composure,—“but there could never be the same regard for her who had spoken them.”

That honeyed, reed-like voice would have deceived a wiser head than Rob's that swam so high and airily, as light as a humming bird's in Mary's dear presence, and under the spell of her eyes, though he was sadly resolved that she was altogether heartless.

“Perhaps not in some instances,” he replied, utterly tactless, supremely fatuous. “But for me, in less

than a day, I only grew to—to love you more, though it was hopeless, and more and more, God help me, every day of my life.”

“So many days,” sighed the sweet and heartless voice; “but I shall always have to remember there was one day, Rob, when you did not love me.”

He thought she was going to laugh. He looked up curiously, and saw only a very grave and beautiful profile contemplating spaces and infinitudes that had no connection with his poor story.

“Well, I don’t know,” he murmured despairingly; “probably I did that day too, although I did not know it.”

She did laugh, softly, but to his astonishment there were tears in the eyes that turned to meet his.

“Then, since you include that day too, and there is no omission, I think I have something to tell you, too, Rob.” The bright wave of crimson that swept over her face changed to a divine pallor, as she made thus her great amends to him. “Though it is all hopeless, as you say, yet I should always want to remember that I told you this. If it is any comfort to you, to hear it from me, why, then, I want you to know, Rob, that you are more of a man in my eyes than any other I have ever met on earth; and that I love you, Robert lad, I love you with all my heart. Now, go. We must bear our lives, and God help us to bear them.”

“Mary!—Mary!” gasped Rob, his beatific face confirming her recent statement that he could “see as far as heaven,” “do you mean—that you care for me—as a man you could have married?”

“A man whom I did not consider worthy of that

honor”—the flute-voice renewed its smooth and even music—“would not be the one I have just described to your humble sense as the strongest, noblest, and bravest that it has ever been my lot to meet. Now, mad though you are for flattery, Robert, I have said those words for the last time. We must meet the future bravely. In a sense, this must be our farewell: it is ‘hail and farewell,’ for us, Robert lad.”

“No—never, never!” said Rob breathlessly, as though he actually plunged through the pearly gates of bliss; “there’ll be a way! There must be a way! I’ll make a way! I was not worthy—but I’ve won you! Say I’ve won you, since you care for me. Oh, God! I thought the way was hard, and all the time I was climbing up a hill that led to glory and the joy of life.” He rose and strode once back and forth across the room, his humming-bird lightness of head carrying him altogether into the realms of bliss.

“I’ll make a way, my beautiful, my dearest——”

“Virginia is stirring,” said the flute-voice, low. “You are behaving insanely. She will come in here presently.”

“She will only think you have refused me,” bending the ecstasy of his smile on Mary. “I am going out to tell her. Come with me, or I shall think I am dreaming. Come with me, dearest. You owe me this much. Remember the unkind ‘exaggerated’ speech you made about me.”

“I remember,” said Mary sadly; “but we must remember other things as well. We are not free, neither you nor I.”

“What binds you?” said Rob, in a flash, gritting

his teeth in her very face, like a lion about to start out on the devouring path. Mary smiled.

"Not a lover," she made haste to say, "but I shall not leave Bate; no one else would make a home for him, or have two days' patience with him. No one. Even if you were free," she reminded him, very gently, for his joy was sweet to her.

Rob's "intuitive" eyes, scorning all barriers, took infinite largess of the future. He shrugged his broad shoulders as though the world of sordid entanglement, privation, and doubt fell from them lightly.

"Besides," she said, "remember it was your faithfulness to what you believed to be your duty that won me to you, made me trust you. It would be a poor reward if your love for me made you give up the fight, Rob."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE "WRASTLE" BY THE RIVER

THE tremendous gorge of the River seemed to miss half the tides. It filled, of course, regularly; but to me, in memory, it seems ever to lie there, bare, eating its heart out in smiting sun and shrieking wind, ragged with boulders, its few harbored vessels lying in the ways exposed like ghosts without an element.

Well, the tide had gone out of my soul, too, and left it stony and dry, only the ghosts of dead hopes stranded bleak along its channel.

Captain Belcher, shouting cheerfully along the highway with his oxen, seemed a denizen of another world. But I had business with him.

"Stu," said I, "you got to speak up. I'm boss. It's my turn. I'm running the thing now. Here's a paper ready made. Read it, and put your fist to it, or we'll see which is the best man, you or me. We'll settle it within this very identical ten minutes right here on the ground. Here's pen and ink. I brought 'em in my pocket a purpose."

WITNESSETH, Stuyvesant Belcher and James Turbine: I, Stuyvesant Belcher do hereby say and acknowledge, that, the justice of the peace being at the time incapacitated, I myself did by way of a jest perform a ceremony purporting and

pretending to be a marriage ceremony uniting Cuby Tee-bo and Robert Hilton. But, having no license or authority to perform any such ceremony, I do hereby declare and confess the same to be null and void, and in no way binding upon the said Cuby Tee-bo and Robert Hilton.

And I, James Turbine, whose name is also affixed hereto, do say and covenant, that no persecution by law or otherwise shall be instituted or carried on against the said Stuyvesant Belcher.

Signed,

Signed, JAMES TURBINE.

“Jim, you’re a scholar,” said Belcher reflectively, looking long and keenly at me; “you got it bad. Now, Jim, the ’arth is all ’iled and runnin’ smooth. Why don’t ye let her be till she begins ter creak? Then I’d see what I c’d do.”

I laughed. “Sign here, Stu,” I said.

“Whar’d ye steal this pen, Jim? Which end d’ ye dip in the fluid? Mix a pint bottle o’ ink next time, ’stead o’ a quart, an’ put in more bootblack, an’ less dough an’ hens’-ile, Jim; add a leetle molasses soon as ye git home, and a tetch o’ new milk and cinnamon—somethin’ soothin’. I better sign my own copy, too?”

“Certainly.”

“Jim, see here; I can’t git this signature ter look like the other. First time I signed my name there was a ham-rind stickin’ to the point o’ the pen, and now I’m workin’ around here with a griddle-cake that fastened onto the nib second time I dipped her into the

bottle. The' ain't no manner o' resemblance between them two signatures. I sh'll be held up for forgery."

"No, I'll look out for that."

"You'll perfect me, Jim?" said Belcher, with a great affectation of maiden simplicity.

"I'll stand by ye to the last ditch, Stu."

"Because, ef ye couldn't, I'm perfectly competent ter look out f'r myself. So you're runnin' things now, are ye, Jim? I thought the sun was risin' kind o' different this mornin', and the tides hove in as ef some-thin' was werryin' 'em. Wal', don't be too brash, Jim. Handle 'em easy. How do ye like yer position? Does the highmightiness of it pay ye for the pains?"

"No."

"Never mind. Somebody's got ter do it, an' I'm glad o' a rest, tell you work up a herric'n an' I have ter step in an' put things ter rights again. Wal', can I move on now, or is thar' any more writin' ter do? Good-by, Jim. Remember what I told ye about puttin' some fresh-laid eggs, well beaten, and a tablespoonful o' vanilla extrac' inter that ink."

I put Rob's release safe in my inner pocket. When you are clearing the way for other people's bliss, and the woman in it has grown into your life till you don't hardly know life without her, you see blank for a while; that is, if you're not a better man than ever I was.

As I stood staring a bit toward the hill, meditating whether it was better to climb it at once and deliver over the paper to Rob, or sail direct over to Waldeck and telegraph Doctor Margate to come on and re-establish his charge financially, and take him and Mary away out of harm, not knowing what might befall them

from the Gar' Tee-bo and Bate source, especially now if the altered conditions of Rob's life were known; so, as I stood, Cuby herself came running to me from her cabin door, all excitement, the brown hair on her forehead waving, hatless.

"Oh, Jeem, the bears is comin'! The bears is comin'! Look you!"

I looked, and saw—a recurrent yearly event in this region—three tawny bears of huge dimensions led by their keepers, approaching along the bluffs, creeping mightily and cumbrously along; resigned and hopeless travelers, soon to go through a forced dance and pass the obsequious hat before us.

"Sure enough," I said. "Lord pity them."

"Come along, Jim," cried Cuby, her bright face glowing, her eyes shining a rebuke at my indifference; "come you down to be near them when they dance."

She caught my hand, and I followed. Mysteriously arising from all quarters boys and girls, men and women, began to dot the face of nature; from Joggins and the steep way and the lanes in all directions, the groups began to gather in a nucleus at the River settlement.

I saw Rob, one arm upheld in a sling, little Rhody Ditmarse drawing him eagerly by the other hand. He smiled when he saw us and came instantly over to us.

Rhody's small and wise countenance was abeam with the general excitement and satisfaction.

"Me an' Rob cut a great pace hyperin' down here to the frolick, soon as ever we see the bears a-comin'," she said, and added, in explanation of the green apples she was heartily devouring, "of course, seein' as I was

off on a good time, I had to ketch off a few cholery-balls to chew on the way."

Rob gave his familiar laugh of supreme enjoyment and marveling admiration of Rhody. I can see that genial face, to this day; no covert ridicule there, but only as if he said, "Was there ever such a brilliant little girl as this?" She made a hopeful diversion, for though Rob and Cuby made some talk together, they were not at ease in each other's company.

"My, but I admire your cap w'at you wear, little Rhode'," said Cuby, as if making friends on the whole with this small and competent being who had once so emphatically relieved her from the situation of "Grief" on the Sunday-school stage; "it mus' make-a you proud, that cap."

"Oh no," said Rhody gravely; "they come free. But, o' course, I couldn't wear my Sunday hat to the bear-frolick. A man goes around givin' these away, an' you wear it all around so as to make known the goods what's wrote on it." There was an illustration of a table on Rhody's cap, surrounded by a family group, from aged grandparent to infant in highchair, and above the festive scene shone in clear type the words, "Home Circle Tea."

"Car'line Treet," continued Rhody, "keeps wearin' her old 'sody' cap. She says, 'A dog 't ye know, with its fur droopin', is better 'n a strange cat with a ribbond 'round its neck.' Mebby she's right, but anyway, Home Circle Tea's cap is the very last one they've been 'round with, and all the children's a-wearin' 'em"—a statement confirmed on the spot by the moving panorama of caps bearing that legend.

Rhody put up her hard little fist to grasp Rob's hand in ecstasy as the bears came lunging down the steeps, and Rob held her hand, smiling.

I knew not whether to slip the paper, then, into his possession. While at sight of his face, I found myself willing enough, and eager, to do that, yet the look of Bate's face and Gar' Tee-bo's glooming on the far edge of the group bade me restrain the impulse yet a while. I was thinking it might be better first to make my sail to Waldeck and send my message to the doctor, and—to have another talk with Cuby.

“Forward-a-march-a!” commanded the keepers of their bears, in stentorian Italian mingled with evidences of a bad cold in the head. The three great beasts stood erect, and marched in time to an execrable tune sniffed wearily and perfunctorily through the noses of the three showmen; marched and counter-marched, gigantic creatures, offspring of the wilds about them, who could have annihilated their keepers by a stroke of the paw and scattered the multitude like chaff before the wind.

Their eyes were sodden, dull. The mighty wilderness that had been theirs by right lay all about them; and they, tamed to earn their masters' bread and to forego their very nature—the epitome of awful patience and of all-crushed desire—they danced and climbed the swaying flagpole and “said their prayers” amid the jibes of the crowd with the huge compliance of painfully uplifted paws.

The tide was creeping in apace; with it came the wind of all bold adventure and triumph over adversity and pain.

“Now wrastle-a-wrastle-a for the people.”

They clinched and struggled in forced combat, growling angrily, so well trained, indeed, to simulated wrath that their huge embrace showed intensely dramatic against the background of the sea and hills. There was a strange majesty about them; the wilderness was still in them, and imperial strength. In my heart I commended them to break away and make for the lair of the forests that was waiting to receive them, but they struggled on with sovereign obedience.

"No *man* is my keeper," I muttered. "I do so because I will—and I'll do it with *joy*, by God, because I *am* a man."

"What?" said Cuby. "You make-a talk to yourself, Jeem?" and she laughed.

The crowd was dispersing; the keepers, with the hat of coppers collected through the incongruous whining and scraping of the mighty bears, had tied the beasts to a meal in the shed while they entered the "boarding-house" for refreshment. Rob and Rhody were beginning the ascent of the hill. The release paper was still in my pocket, and there was much to do.

"No, I don't want to talk to myself, Cuby," I answered. "I want to talk with you. It's in dead earnest, too." We turned, walking slowly toward her cabin together.

"You know, Cuby, I've always loved Mary Stingaree. I love her still, but that's over."

"God is good to you, Jeem," declared Cuby, with a brave toss of the head.

"Now, you like to flirt with about everybody, Cuby, and you've tried it a little on me, when there was no better subject. I'm a rough old fellow. I don't expect

or reckon you could love me. But I've been thinking; and it seems to me, when we've got things settled, you and I had better make out to sea together, and try some new port for setting up a shanty. What do you say, little girl?"

"Me," said Cuby in pale earnest. "I care not who you loaf, so you let me mek' sail with you, Jeem."

"Do you care so much about sailing as that?"

"Look you," she said, her eyes very wide on mine.

"I care for sailing, yes; but I loaf-a you, Jeem."

"So you told Rob, once?"

"But he—no! I play with heem. I mek' b'lieve. See, I cross-a my heart; it was you always I loaf. Now, I have said, an' I am not ashem'."

The stars of her eyes looked boldly, yet with a certain flower-like womanly sweetness, at me, out of her pale face; but above all things I saw, to my sudden enlightenment and amaze, that they were full of truth.

"Nothin' can mek' to scare you an' me, Jeem," she laughed with a catch in her breath. "We go very good together."

"But I am frightened to have you stay here, Cuby. Your father and Bate are running down hill; they are making their spree permanent; they are drinking so much rum these days they are hardly responsible beings."

"Look you, Jeem." Cuby glanced all about her, her little forefinger lifted hushingly and warningly at me. "Jeem," she whispered, "I know very much. Eef you let me not to go with you, I have med my mind I shall run away by myself. Hush—they are weecked! They mek' talk by themselves when they have drink too much.

They theenk I am frien's to them. I am not frien's to them—but I tell no one but you—hush."

"What is it, little girl? You can trust me. As you say, you and I 'go together' henceforth. What are they planning? There's no one about. Do not be afraid. In a few days' time, I will have you out of this for good. Tell me all, Cuby."

"They plan a harm to you and Rob both. Bot Marsy, w'at come in shore two days ago—he halp them in it. I was happen' to be the other side the wall, pickin' chips. They was drunk. I hear them. They say Rob has money, an' purty soon—they say—you shall sail to Waldeck and get *your* money an' mek' away out o' here."

"Now, how did they know that, the devils. I had not told even you. I had not made up my mind until to-day."

"My father gets a scare of them. They dreenk, an' mek' a gre't laugh, an' say they shall nip the monies off you an' Rob biffore you mek' away. They say they shall with the monies mek' away themselves, an' carry me with them. But they shall not. I med' my mind. I shall more rather die. My father gets a scare at them. When they was seelly with the dreenk he turn-a them out of his house. Hush, Jeem, eef they know I tell-a you they keell me. They sleep at the 'Spook House.' They have much dreenk there. Only me an' my father know. Eef we tell, they keell us; eef I tell, my father keell me. They said it is comin' a full moon, an' they see all over the worl' up at the Spook House, so, whan it is good tam' they nip the monies off you an' Rob, an' mek' away."

"Is that all?" I said cheerfully. "I could defend myself against half-a-dozen such fellows, little girl. They will not molest you till they get the moneys; and as for Rob—I'll not tell him, never fear—but I'll see that he stays safe indoors o' nights, and that a strong man sleeps in the shed for guard. I know just the man."

"Oh, but Jeem—Jeem—eef they come behind you in the night, eef they strak' you on a sudden. Ah—they say you an' Rob weesh to parsacute them an' put them in a preeson—they say they got a right for to do you."

"Have patience just a little while longer, Cuby, and trust me. I must see some things settled before we go. Your marriage to Rob was no marriage. It was a farce. You knew that?"

She smiled intelligently. "Nem' it not to me," she said. "Nem' that to me no more. It was stupeed. I mek' a laugh at myself."

"And you are ready at any time to say that it was Belcher and not Dessup who performed that ceremony?"

"Sart'nlee," smiled Cuby. "It is but to amuse. But, Jeem, say you not'ings until you an' me go away together. My father keel me. Ah, Jeem," she continued, her face unclouded by the former sinister reflection, "I weell-a mek' you 'appy. I am good sailor. I work for you. I mek' all clean. I cook—ah, Jeem, I am one cook celebrate'."

"That is good. I am tired of my old frying-pan. For years I've been contented over in my cabin or on cruise, making my bread, frying my fish, and hashing

my potatoes in that old pan ; but we want all things new, don't we, Cuby, when we go out with the tide some day soon, and forage around for a home in some new quarter of the earth? We'll begin all new, my girl; and when I come back from Waldeck we must go to old Dessup and get married."

"What-a. You marry me, Jeem?" cried Cuby, as loud as she dared whisper. "You mek'-a to marry me forever an' ever your wife? Jeem, I leef for you. I die for you. See, I fall on my knee——"

"No, no," I said, holding her, "my little girl. What did you think"—the pathos of it melted me to a sense of eternal loyalty. "My wife?—of course. Forever?—yes. And I'll be true and good to you, Cuby."

With her hand trembling in mine I looked at the bleak gorge where the incoming tide would make a sweet, full river by and by, and I thought not too sadly now of the hour when we should make out to where the ocean, too, is eternal. A hand that confides in you is a hand that supports you most of all. A little touch like that is beyond the fire and challenge of love; the charge is inalienable.

And I should prove myself Rob's friend, and Mary's. Mary—the courting of her would be a high office for any man, meeting proud self-respect, lofty intelligence, angelic condescension; but there came to me the shadow of a thought, that perhaps Cuby's giving of herself held in it something a bit more by way of grandeur, after all.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STEEP WAY

So much more did I demand of Belcher, that I enlisted his services to sleep for one night, unknown to the family within, and on oath of secrecy, in the shed of the Stingaree house.

Thereafter I could guard the house myself; but I was for sailing to Waldeck that very night so as to make the return trip on the morrow. The message must be sent at once.

Belcher spent a night of much humor in the shed, according to his relation to me of those circumstances afterwards.

"I've suffered for ye, Jim," said he. "What are ye so scart about Ma'y Stingaree for? The's nothin' around to harm her. She's mittened ye anyway, eh? You're a durn crank, Jim. You been a partly supportin' her an' Bate unbeknownst to 'em this long while, like a chapter outer the gospil. *You* ain't no gospil. You're a durn tuff, two-leggid crank, that's what you be. Why don't ye haul yerself tergether and act like a Christian?"

"I'm aiming for that, Stu."

"Wal', ye won't aim through me ag'in. I've spent my last night in that hell-racket. I'd ruther make my piller on the flats 'long o' the clams. They're quiet. I'd no sunner wrinch a rat off 'n my ear an' throw him agin the side o' the shed, than I'd have ter pull one off

my nose. Ef I opened my mouth, they'd begin ter draw my teeth. Then when I'd slew so many of 'em that I was wore out and kind o' dozed off, ef three Toms an' harf-a-dozen Betty cats follerin' didn't make a dash at that little eight-by-ten-inch winderpane in the rear o' the shed ter git in outer the rain; they lep so husky, an' so fur, they landed clean acrost the shed on my sleepin' mouth, every durn one of 'em. Wal', don't say nothin'," sighed Belcher; "Jim, I've suffered for ye."

"I'll never forget it, Stu."

"Ye better not, ye blame ol' cabinet-size fool," responded Belcher, with a wink of such cheerful confidence it almost took on the hue of affection.

If Belcher passed a night which he was able to construe afterwards into so jocose an epic, I managed to make a joy as well of that dark long sail to Waldeck. It came on to rain, and the wind blew. But I knew my course. I liked that night! I loved it! By Heaven, I had joy! The storm and I fought it out alone in the darkness. I tried my boat and sped her on. I knew we should not fail.

It was too early for business in the town when I tied to the wharf off Waldeck; so I lay down to take a nap in the cuddy of my own boat. When I woke the day had dawned soft and warm. I missed the cold wind and the storm, and went languidly in the sunshine, a sort of ghost, preoccupied, amid the crude and noisy traffic round about me; and I sent my message. I drew my money from the bank, for I had a longer voyage in mind, and I should not touch at Waldeck again.

The wind was faint and baffling when I set sail for

home, but it breezed handsomely to a flying gale with the high tide, and I made port before sunset.

Then for the next few days came the waiting for the boat I had engaged to bring the doctor over from Waldeck to show in the offing; that, and the necessary precautions for Mary and Rob and Cuby. I could have broken up the nest at Spook House, but that would have brought Bate's recent history to light, and he was Mary's brother; his crime had been against Rob, whom she loved; and I, with heart and soul, was all for binding their romance now, not destroying it. And to spirit Mary and Rob away, and to take Cuby away, before harm befell them, that was my work.

Some labor I did in the cornfield too, where my scarecrow stood true. Mrs. Byjo was true. She slept for defense on the lounge in the house, while I slept in the shed, unknown to them within.

"What ailed Stu Belcher t'other night?" Mrs. Byjo inquired, passing sturdily through the field on her way home. "Queerest ructions I ever knew concerning Stu. I knew he took a little once in a while, but I thought he always kept his head."

"Why, what now?"

"Why, about ten o'clock o' night, I was reading, I heard the steadiest snoring out in the shed—good, peaceable, honest, thundering snoring. There wasn't any villainy to that snore, and it was dead heavy; no timber that snored like that would work ye any harm. And I went and looked, and there lay Stu Belcher. I shut the door and went back to consider of it. If you'll believe me, he lay there and kept his exhaust pipe going at that same pace, without any break, till morn-

ing; for I lay awake a long time, listening, and every time I woke afterwards, I heard him, drawing his coal and freight cars up grade, all the night through."

"Funny. Nothing disturbed him—no mice? No cats?"

"The cat was inside under the stove, and I cleaned all the rodents out o' there long ago. But the question is, what was he there for? I said nothing to Mary. Thought I'd ask you first." Her eye twinkled.

"Good old Stu," I said; "he's sort of eccentric, you know. Don't give him away."

"No," said Mrs. Byjo, her commonplace eyes flashing intelligence at me, and with an approving tremble in her voice, "'good old' Jim, nor I won't give you away, neither."

Before noon I went down to the River again, where Cuby was on the lookout continually for the sail that should bring deliverance in the person of the great doctor.

It was yet hardly time for it, we considered, when after a day's work, as I stood looking off at the grand desolate gorge of the river with the lead of suspense on my heart, Cuby, from her cabin door, called to me excitedly, but softly:

"Jeem, the s'el! It is come! It is heem!" The tide was low, and the boat anchored far out. Two men boarded the little punt; one landed and the other returned to the boat. By that time I had raced to the shore. Doctor Margate approached me, his usually ruddy face as pale as death.

"Is she very ill, Jim?" he said. "What is the matter?"

"Mary—she is well," I said.

A great light came over his face suddenly.

"Does she want me?" he asked. "Does she want me to take her away?"

"Sit down here a minute first, sit down here on the bowlder," I said. "Mary Stingaree's a wonderful woman, a sublime woman, but she seems to mix up the ideas in a fellow's head sometimes. I know how that is. Let's sit down here now, and see straight. I—I've got a story to tell ye; but before I begin it I want to say that Rob—*he's done well.*"

"Right! Jim Turbine," said the doctor. "I'm afraid that I know your story," he added. "Rob has done well—marvelously well, I'm afraid?"

I chuckled the same despairing chuckle that he did.

"You're a big man, I know," I said, "but you ain't left anything more important back there in the States than what you've come to here."

His look dwelt on me kindly, without words, singularly long.

"Look here," I braced up to say, laughing, for I did not understand his look; "me and some other tremendous old hulks o' bears, that might 'a' torn everything to pieces if they'd been a mind to—we've marched and we've wrestled and climbed and made our prayers even. I reckon *you've* done some wrestlin' and climbing on your own account, doctor."

"Yes, Jim, you and I have climbed, but I think you have done, impetuously and fearlessly, and wholly and decisively—you have attained something of a peak beyond my reach, my good fellow."

Educated people have a way of making you think

that they're smiling at you inside. Mary had it. But I did not heed it. I had more to say.

"You will father that union between Rob and Mary, doctor? They will be rich, I know. You will do all that mortal can do to make them happy?"

He seemed to be overinterested in studying my gnarled visage.

"You are not old, Jim," he said. "I've been told something about you. You have stood back of Mary Stingaree always when she was here, protecting her, looking out for her, without her full knowledge."

"I could not do much," I said impatiently, for he would not come to the point.

"You loved her best of all, Jim!"

"Me!" I turned and laughed. "Her—for me! What *is* loving?" I said. "Say, I been through some storms I've clambered up the steeps yonder many a wild night, alone. There's a view when ye git up there. Love is pretty much carin' for them that needs care, ain't it?"

His face flushed with a color that was not angry.

"People do not usually act thus, and with the impulse of a dart from the sky, Jim."

"I haven't done it very well, I know," I answered him; "but—I done it."

"Give me your hand," said he, in a quiet, off-hand way. "We've got nothing better back there in the great city of advantages to give Rob than he has found here, Jim."

"That's true, too," I answered. "The work was wonderful good for the lad; and he caught on to the idea of foregoing what he just wanted for what he

ought to do. He caught on to that, wonderful. Shall we climb the steep way, doctor? It's the shortest. Let me carry your bag."

He handed me his burden. Where the hill-lane turns off to the hamlet of Power Lot, God Help Us, I stood a moment before I left him. There was a struggle. I had reckoned on handing the release to Rob myself. I'd sort of pictured it; but the doctor looked so forlorn and courageous standing there, with the steady light of duty in his eyes, it came easy after all, at the wrench.

"Oh, by the way," I says, "will you give this paper to Rob and Mary? I can't go there just now, I got so much to do."

He smiled long at me.

"No, Jim Turbine," he said, "I'll have nothing to do with it. You must bring that yourself later on."

I thrust it in his hand and fled. I had joy of it. No man ruled me. I did what I would.

CHAPTER XXIX

MRS. BYJO KISSES HER BOARDER

As the doctor approached the house the sordid poverty of its surroundings struck him as it had not done before, when he had a blissful hope in his heart.

The romance was not for him. The fences were no longer picturesque; they were distressful and broken down; the attitude of the little porch and of the whole house breathed destitution and decay. Pausing for a moment, he heard steps behind him, and turned to see Mrs. Byjo.

"What!" said she, grasping his hand in cordial surprise, and holding it with fraternal loyalty. "What! By Jo—my boarder!"

"So you did not know that I was expected?" he answered, acknowledging with a genial smile the welcome beaming upon him through her spectacles, while she seemed manly unconscious that his hand was still clasped in her own hard palm.

"I sighted the event, yes," said Mrs. Byjo; "but not quite so near. The Lord has sent ye in the nick o' time. Doctor, I've got a story to tell ye. *Rob's done well.*"

"So I have heard."

"Who told ye?"

"Jim Turbine. In fact, he sent for me."

"He did, did he?" She dropped his hand in her disinterested joy. "By Jo, Jim's done well."

"Who is doing well by *me*?" the doctor blurted out whimsically.

Mrs. Byjo studied him without comprehension. Her own life of complete self-sacrifice had not acquainted her with many habits of personal choice or ambition. The simple bewilderment on her face cut the doctor's spirit of badinage to the quick.

"No wonder Rob has done well," he subjoined; "no wonder Jim has done well. If you would only have adopted me at Power Lot I might have done well, too. You were always kind to me, but you would not make me one of your own, you know."

"No," said she, "you never asked me, and I shouldn't if ye had. My family was such—next thing to royal—there was very few fit for me to mate with, even if I'd had the mind."

Her eyes twinkled humorously behind her glasses. Nevertheless her straight little figure was as actually commanding as it was grotesque.

"Well," he sighed, following her lead with interest, "that is a pity. I can assure you the magnet that drew me back here was strong."

"I know it was," she declared seriously; and her round face sobered. "I know that. The magnet that drew ye was the hope of freeing Rob and Mary and starting 'em off happy together; and I bet on ye, doctor. I bet on ye, by Jo! I bet my cattle and cart on ye! I bet my house and barn on ye! I bet my potato crop, and my livin' soul on ye! Your name may not be in the heraldry, or it may be—I don't know as to that—but for honest, straightforward doing of your part in the sight of God, you come next to the Staf-

fords. Well," she added blithely, "your old room facin' to the Bay is all ready for ye, doctor—and the fish 'll be fried just to suit ye after ye've been over to see the folks. Quit 'em as soon as ye can, and come 'round where things are sensible."

She turned toward her own house. The doctor watched her. Never between heaven and earth had he seen so assertive and self-confident a gait.

"*There's* a thorough antidote for all self-communings," he commented admiringly on her retreating figure. He rather hoped not to meet Rob just yet, when he entered the Stingaree house. The young man whom he had saved had, though innocently, defrauded him in return of something dearer than his possessions, dearer almost than life itself; and, for a weak instant only, he dreaded to meet that engaging sunny face. He had his wish. Rob was farther down the bluffs, pasturing half-a-dozen sheep which, while his arm was still in sling, he had purchased as a humble accessory to his dreams of accumulating wealth.

Mary, alone, too full of anxiety to be able to concentrate her unoccupied moments on a book, had been rummaging about the old house, dusting and rearranging, looking over the few remaining possessions of her own from a wardrobe that had once been dainty and complete.

Her constant thought was that Bate might come in, surly and ashamed; so she conceived the idea of dressing girlishly in white, with ribbons at waist and throat; taking him off guard and keeping him by a manner of assumed festivity and utter oblivion to his past; meeting him with smiles and cheer and welcome.

"So that he will not feel that there is any reproach toward him, nor be afraid—and not think me old and sad. For I am young, really," she murmured. "If I could only move him—if I could get him to take me away before Rob brings *her* to the hill to live; for I cannot bear that. If I could go away with Bate, and save him, and care for him. He may come to-night."

As a sudden fulfillment to her hope and purpose she heard a man's step on the porch; and—it was not Rob's, she knew—therefore, it must be Bate's. She went to meet him with an eager smile.

Doctor Margate was well convinced in that instant that Mary Stingaree, at least, had not expected him. She stood as though some blow had smitten her, as frightened and appealing as *any* sweet human lass clad all in white.

"Doctor Margate—what is the matter?" she cried, and then, "Where is Rob?"

"Yonder," replied the doctor, pointing to where in the distance Rob had just stopped at the affianced Mrs. Treet's door for a chat on his way home. He drew her to a chair. Her weakness seemed the greater for the years wherein she had stood so firmly to her ideals of duty and devotion. Her girlish faintness and silence, the dark, troubled eyes lifted to him with question and appeal, bade him still again the tumult in his own heart.

"My dear," said he, strangely, guardedly, not touching her; "Rob has won your heart, and, since he has done that, the days of poverty and struggle and social ostracism are over for you both. You shall take your proper place. That is why I have come. To take you and Rob away."

"Rob is bound," said Mary, the old purpose and resolve showing bleakly, but true, in her beautiful eyes. "Rob is bound. You do not remember."

"He is bound home, with you. The marriage between him and Cuby Tee-bo was simply a farce. Neither legally nor morally is it binding. Moreover, James Turbine is going to marry the girl and take her away out of harm's way."

"Jim!"

"Let me tell you. I am going to tell you all. It is best. Your brother is insane in his excesses. He—attempted to kill Rob—at some quarry. He stole his money, though compelled afterwards to return that. He is hanging about now, with someone to share his orgy, at the old 'Spook House,' with the intention of doing further harm. Put him into my hands. If aught in this world can help him—he will be helped. Let me have that in charge. Some part of your life I crave; dear girl, let that be my portion of your family life."

There was no scorn on the great man's lips. Mary stretched out her hands as one falling clutches at some support. The doctor did not take her hands, though his words were inexpressibly tender in tone.

"You must bear bravely still the trial of this brother's life," he said. "But you must be true to others as well. You must be true to Rob. If you or he still have any doubt as to your duty or your absolute freedom, why, I understand"—the doctor smiled—"that the fact that the marriage was a farce is so admitted and set down in black and white in a paper which James Turbine obtained and secured, and gave

me to hand to Rob. I have it safe. But I shall see that Captain Turbine gives it to the joyful Rob, himself; for I fancy that he took heroic measures to obtain it."

"Jim!"

When they were in stress of thought, or had nothing else to say, they put the burden of speech off on to that easy-spoken, brief name—they just said "Jim."

"For no other woman"—the tender smile on the doctor's face grew whimsical—"could I have returned that fine young rascal so quickly to his inheritance. With you, I am not afraid. He did well for himself, indeed, when he won your heart. He will be here soon. You are very sweet to-night, and beautiful, troubled, glad, helpless, soft, and young. You would rive the heart of any man—who loved you. Do not tease Rob. Your eyes melt the soul of a man, and bewilder him—any man who loved you. And as for Rob, they say he worships you."

He did not turn to her again. "I am going to my good friend Mrs. Byjo," he said. "When I see you again you and Rob must have your plans made, or I shall have to carry you both away by force."

Mrs. Byjo, her evening work done, was waiting for her "boarder."

"Well," said the doctor cheerfully, in straightforward Power Lot, God Help Us, fashion, "Mary and Rob are going away with me, to be married. They will have the means to live in royal style, my good friend. Captain James Turbine will be marrying Cuby and roaming away with her."

Mrs. Byjo suddenly sprang forward and kissed the

gentle though distinguished gentleman. Her spectacles were scattered with the impetuosity of the impact, and she searched for them without embarrassment, and with joyful tears in her eyes, the doctor aiding her.

"I thank you for that mark of your approval—and condescension, Mrs. Stafford," he said very gravely; and added gently, "I hold that kiss as sacred."

"If I was young and handsome and rich, which I never was," said Mrs. Byjo, settling her restored glasses on her pathetic little snub nose, "you'd seem like a brother to me; for being of the family I am, and not knowing yours, I don't know as I could consider any closer tie; but the poor old woman couldn't help giving ye a smack."

"I shall never forget that I have a royal sister," replied the doctor, "who has given me a token of esteem which I hold forever sacred."

CHAPTER XXX

ALL IN WHITE

CUBY could tie her clothes in a bundle. She could wear her Sunday hat till the sea winds tore and the fogs wilted it. That would be part of her honeymoon. Then she would go cheerfully back to the old felt headgear. Life was plain and easy for us to sail forth unhampered.

"You are bold," my bride-elect commended me, with a vain toss of the head; "you wait not, you go sweet as the wind. But Ma'y Sting'ree and Rob, they go not so much even as a leetle way with us?" she asked, anxious to be assured on that point.

"No, another boat is engaged to take them to Waldeck, and then they will go by the railroad; they will go back to a life you and I know nothing about. But you and I will sail where we will, Cuby, and anchor where we will; and when we find the right place—the place that suits us—we'll settle down there and live by the fishing."

"You will be 'appy if you are on the water every day, Jeem?" she said wistfully.

That went to my heart.

"We will be happy on the water or on shore at home; never fear, girl," said I. And now that my work was about done, I was as eager as she to get out to sea. I had one more night to sleep as guard in the shed of the Stingaree house. When their lights went out up

yonder on the hill, then I made my stealthy way thither, knowing that Cuby was safe by the River. Bate and his crony would not trouble her until they had secured the booty they were reckoning on.

There was a patient show that last evening, as patient as the bears. After an un-theatered hiatus of months, the traveling shows were making a record of unprecedented frequency along the River. It was a ventriloquist this time—a ventriloquist and sleight-of-hand performer in one; and so satanic and diabolical were his occult powers believed to be, he was relegated to the basement of the schoolhouse, the only cover large enough to hold his ready audience. Belcher was there.

The patient little showman waited long after the hour advertised for the initial dish of the dark feast he was to give, in order to see whether some of the many faces leering in from the outside of the uncurtained windows would pay the necessary fee for an entrance.

“See here,” Belcher’s voice broke the silence, “you got a good-sized audience inside here—all the chairs ’ll hold. Go ahead with your fork-lightning and salt-peter.”

With a consenting sigh our entertainer seated himself on a deal chair in the center of the platform, a caricature of the Irish race represented in the doll which he held on his right knee, while on the other knee he supported an equally exaggerated type of dark and unkempt Africa.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “let me introduce to you Mr. Maguire and Mr. Johnsing, who will now carry on a mysterious conversation together without the

aid of human instruments. As you observe and listen, you will wonder how these little mechanical devices—for I assure you these are nothing but ordinary dolls—can open and shut their mouths, and converse in intelligent sounds plainly issuing from their own insides. If anyone in my audience doubts that these are simply ordinary dolls, I invite him to come to the platform and examine them now, for they have sometimes been interrupted in the midst of an interesting conversation by clamors on the part of the audience maintaining that they were not dolls at all, but human midgets that I was palming off upon them as miraculous talkers. Would anyone like to come up and examine the dolls? ”

A crude and credulous being from the rear of the house wended his way to the platform and inspected carefully the objects on the performer's lap.

“Them's dolls,” he reassured the audience with a grin, and went lumberingly back to his seat by the water pail.

“You hear,” said the showman, “these are none other than ordinary dolls. Now——

“ ‘The tap o' the day to yez, Sambo. W'ot's afther puttin' the kink in yer hair, eh? ’ ” the mouth of the Irish doll, as presumable authority for this rude speech, opened and shut with the automatic regularity of a piston rod; and a shout of glee went up from some small untraveled boys, for whom the present occasion contained every element of vivid excitement.

“ ‘Min' yo' business, Paddy. My ha'r's all right. Say, do every'body in Cork have ears de size o' yourn? ’ ”

"The nigger-doll's mouth ain't workin'," protested one of the small boys, in a loud cry of bitter chagrin.

The magician blushed with an active emotion, as of an old pain revived, and, working vigorously at the crank concealed in Sambo's back, he bent his head to observe whether the lips of the recalcitrant one moved in becoming accord; but that thick orifice remained obstinately shut. With a deep sigh he laid the Irish orator on the floor, and placing Africa face downwards across his knees he gave his entire attention to readjusting the springs which so fatally controlled the vocal organs of this dark subject. Again and again he essayed to compel issuance of speech, but though bold verbal assault and caustic ribaldry possessed the African from head to toe, the mouth necessary to confirm these emotions remained shut with the tenacity of a sprung trap.

"Want a screwdriver?" volunteered Belcher, obligingly making his way to the platform. "I always carry one in my pocket, and I worked in a machine-shop a spell, once. We'll make Sambo open his mouth, 'r know the reason why. Nobody ain't got no right ter deliver themselves o' sech a mess o' sass as that with their mouth shet."

While Belcher, with the sweat streaming from his brow—for the room was close and hot—was thus studiously repairing the first number of the performer's subtle programme, the flock who had been gaping in through the windows flowed noiselessly in and disposed themselves in good form among the worthier and legitimately registered guests.

But though his back was turned in anxious con-

temptation of Belcher's skill, the showman was entirely conscious of this act of piracy. He took his collecting-dish from among the other resources and paraphernalia of his inscrutable art, and proceeded to pass it among the newcomers.

"No, thank ye," politely observed the first pirate into whose face the dish was suggestively thrust. "I won't take anything. I had my supper jest before I left home."

"This," explained the magician, "is my dish for collecting entrance fees."

The courteous pirate put his hand to his ear and leaned forward smilingly. "Thank ye, jest the same," he repeated. "I won't take anything. I had my supper."

The faint artist continued to wander, holding out his dish in the hope of finding truth and some more substantial spoils, until interrupted by Belcher, under whose manipulation Sambo's mouth was now opening to the utmost limit and shutting regularly with the loud precision of a corn-sheller.

"Oh, let 'em alone, and come up here and play out some more o' yer bill," said the good-natured Belcher, resuming his unofficial seat among the audience. "All on us that paid could git our money back ef we wanted to, 'cause you advertised them dolls ter talk without aid o' human instruments. A screw-driver's a human instrument, ain't it? An' it's me an' my screw-driver has geared up Sambo, thar', into yawpin' trim agin. But we don't want our money back. Ye're a-doin' well. Ye're a-doin' first-rate. The show ain't what it advertised ter be, but it's a durn sight better. 'Xceptin'

when some special number—like Sambo thar’—needs regulatin’, it’s the restfullest thing I ever went to. Let the boys alone, Beelzebub; git up onto the platform; turn on yer fireworks agin; make yer dynamite rattle now.”

Inspired by this pyrotechnic utterance, the disheartened craftsman reseated himself and worked Sambo and Paddy to such facetious measures, including several songs, that a round of applause followed. Misled by this generous encouragement, the dialogue stretched on and on into such overbearing proportions of time that the pirates rose wearily at last and stalked boldly forth into the outer elements, where they languidly resumed their old post of observation at the windows. They were joined by a number, who, though legitimately entitled to the luxury of the interior, were willing to forego their privilege for the sake of the clearer atmosphere outside; among these Cuby and I stood near a window which had been opened several inches by an unscrupulous pirate resolved to hear as well as see.

Our cheeks were wet with tears of laughter; and we were to sail next day, the Lord knew where; and there was a suspicion of tragedy in the air. And what there had been to laugh at, I could not have told if brought to any analysis of it, but we had laughed the very richness of spontaneous mirth. Maybe it was Belcher’s face, magisterially grave and observant of proceedings on the stage, or it may have been the many unrelated incidents among the audience, which made that body a far livelier theater of action than the recognized platform.

I sobered, as the free wind struck my face again, and

looked off toward the hill. The lights were still burning brightly there.

"When the lights go out I must see you home and then go up yonder to my watch, Cuby," I said.

"All right, Jeem," replied my fearless little maiden. The unknown future held only the joy of release and of all possible adventure to her.

We heard Belcher's voice, so dominant that it pealed out roundly through the open window:

"It's wonderful, Beelzebub. The way you make them dolls talk without no human agency is a mystery to *me*, anyhow. But now the hour is waxin' kind o' late, suppose you pass on to the next figger in the programme. Put in some sulphur this time, Beelzebub; we're gittin' a mite sleepy."

The showman rose obediently, laid aside his dolls, and advanced to the front of the platform with a bow, as a preface to the next act.

"I will now," he said, "to your astonishment, take from the neck of anyone in the audience whom you may name and choose to point out to me for the act, a live goose. Positively, a live goose. You will be at liberty to inspect and handle the same after I have brought it to light, in order to assure yourselves that it is indeed an ordinary bird of the species known to man, such as we are all accustomed to, though its mysterious and unaccountable appearance from the neck of anyone you may mention in the audience has never yet been explained by any known laws of science."

With another bow he retreated to the dim corner near a loose-gear end window where his few stage trappings lay piled. He was evidently rummaging,

and as the search continued, it was felt that some blight had already fallen upon the proposed miracle. The magician suddenly rushed to the front of the stage in a panic.

"My goose is gone," he cried accusingly. "Who has stolen my goose?"

"Where'd you keep him?" inquired Belcher.

"In a cratebox under my table. A blanket lay on top of the box, and my accordion was on top of the blanket."

"Is yer accordion gone?"

"No."

"Wal', you play something for the folks on yer accordion, and I'll find yer goose for ye," said Belcher, rising. He strolled out among the pirates familiarly.

"Look-a here, you cubs," he accosted them, "you hand over poor Beelzebub's goose. Poor leetle creetur', he only charged five cents admission, an' it's a durn sight funnier 'n the real thing. An' *you* didn't pay nothin'. Poor leetle cuss, he ain't got no gift for what he's undertook ter do, but I'm goin' ter advise him kind and gentle by 'n by ter quit jugglery, an' steal a hymnbook off somebody when they ain't lookin', an' go off 's one o' these 'ere furrin missionaries. Now you hand me over that goose, an' watch through the winders an' see Beelzebub haul him outer Towse Duffrey's coat collar. Sport's been kind o' mild so fur, but the wind's go'n' ter breeze afore we git through. Gi' me that goose."

A torpid bird of that description was held out to Belcher, who seized it and returned to the scene of troubled legerdemain. As the showman saw him ap-

proaching with the prize he changed a plaintive rendering of "Annie Laurie" into the jubilant strains of "Marching Through Georgia."

But we did not stay to witness the fulfillment of Belcher's prophecy; the night had worn on, the lights were out away off on the hill.

"It was a patient show," I observed to Cuby, conducting her home; "the poor fellow was patient, and he had a gift of language."

"Capataine Belcher could do a more bettaire show than heem," said Cuby. She would have regretted deeply leaving the sprightly scene at this inconclusive hour, had not her mind been full of the supreme adventure on which we were to embark on the morrow.

I kissed her good-night, and turned to my long tramp towards the steeps, and up them, to fulfill my last watch in Power Lot, God Help Us. The moon was almost at its full, and the brooding of it over ocean, hill and plain was like a voice falling infinitely peaceful and tender—one knew not from where. It was more than moonlight on the quiet earth; it was a plain speaking, though I knew not the language of it.

Down below, they opened all the windows where the show was in progress, therefore I heard; the magician had struck up an air, the sweet old melody of which reached me faintly in the distance, "Nearer, My God, to Thee." The faint, far echo of that strain was like a pervading spirit, consonant with the moonlight, flooding with compassion all poor human jugglery and endeavor, even as the moon flooded the earth with tender glory.

I don't know what God has got for a man up yonder

—that, through a thought or a strain of music some times, the sense comes to him that nothing matters very much, that there's nothing on earth but what is easy to put by, since the voice that he hears, less than a whisper now, may speak to him at last in full tones that he understands.

I had forgotten the habit of caution and watchfulness to which I had been schooling myself of late, so absorbed was I in the wonder that fell on my heart; when, from over on the summit, by the old church—"Spook House"—a scream of terror and agony came to me, piercing my very soul. I knew it for Mary's voice.

I ran madly. I saw the figure of a man flying across to the bluffs. Retribution, swift and sure, should find him out, but now my one purpose was to reach *her*. I leaped all obstacles and rushed up the hill, a horrible fear possessing me. The door of the church was open and I sprang in.

Bate Stingaree lay on the floor, gibbering and writhing. Mary had slipped, fainting, by the window from which she had screamed for aid.

"Jim's dead, too," raved Bate, shriveling white before my eyes. "Mary's dead—all come to torment me." The room reeked with vile odors and with the fumes of alcohol. "Why, ain't *you* got white clothes on, Jim? For you're dead, you and Ma'y are dead, I know it. Come, somebody that's alive. Help! Help! Where's the stuff? Give me something that 'll shut my eyes. I can't stand this." With oaths and cries of terror, his ghastly hand crept over the floor, seeking for his bottle.

I lifted Mary. It wrung my heart to see the poor white dress, in which she had been so happy and girlish a little while before—she, to whom so little happiness had come, whose cup had ever been turned to bitterness. I lifted her and carried her outside; and as the strong wind smote her face, she gasped once and again, and opened her great, desolate, dark eyes and knew me.

“Jim,” she said, and seized my hand convulsively, as though she feared that I would move from her side.

“Why, yes, it’s old Jim,” I soothed her. “It’s old Jim, sure, in the flesh.”

Leaning heavily on my arm, so that I almost carried her, as soon as she was able she drew me back into the church.

“Bate,” she gasped; “Bate,” and pointed pitifully to where he lay. Bate’s writhing had ceased.

“It was I frightened him,” she gasped. “I never dreamed—I wanted to see him—I never dreamed he was so—ill—I never thought of the white dress. Look, he is not dead? My poor brother! My poor brother!”

I did not know. “He is asleep,” I said; “in a drunken sleep. Come! I must take you home, and bring help.”

On the way, still hanging weakly, faintly, to my arm, she told me:

“I put the lights out in the house when Virginia had gone to sleep. Rob was asleep upstairs. I crept out. I, to be so happy—and my brother wretched and forsaken. I meant to find him—to plead with him **once more**—to talk over with him what he should do. I was not afraid. I did not think about my white dress—nor the strangeness of my going in the night, alone

—nor the name of the old church, that it was haunted. I only felt that I must see him.

“Once before, he had hid there. I knew that he was there—and I went. There was another man with him. The door was not locked. I opened it and went in. They were leaning together at the window toward the steep road, watching. Bate turned and saw me, and threw up his arms and fell. The other leaped from the window and ran. When I saw Bate’s face—and his groveling and writhing—as if he were hurt—and gone insane—I screamed.”

I left Mary at the house with Mrs. Stafford, awakened, and I roused Rob. Together we went back to the church. Bate lay quiet on the floor.

That desperate, wild, sodden heart was steeped at last in the rest that waketh not to earth. Together we carried him home—Rob and I.

Mary lay on the couch with Mrs. Stafford’s friendly arm about her. Her eyes questioned me with only fear and horror in their depths.

“We have brought him home,” I said, “and God has brought him home. What do you think,” I said sharply and sternly, for she would have fainted again, “have you lived up here, looking off on the sea from Power Lot, God Help Us, so long, not to remember ever that the Great Deep is infinite?”

Her eyes, fastened upon me, besought me.

“He was born,” I said, “weak and infirm of nature—with what defects God knows who has taken him—has taken him home, I say. And it is well. You are no true hearts that would say otherwise. By the look on his poor face, he too was born again even in the

moment of his passing. Why not? Do not wail and weep, as if you and we alone had the insight of God's long plans and the monopoly of His mercy."

"Jim," she gasped, appealing, "I—blame—myself."

"You are weak then, Mary. You went to him as a last brave impulse in a long drill of unrequited forbearance and devotion. It would have been the same. He would only have worked further ill here. It is well. But you are only faithless and unloving, weak and frightened, in the thoughts you have toward him now—and that is not like you."

The hope and color of the living had come back a little faintly to her face, and she was resting now upon Rob's strong arm; but her hand she lifted up and placed in mine.

"You are very sure, Jim? You believe those words you said?"

"Aye, I believe them with all my soul."

"No, but hold my hand a little, Jim," she said, almost fretfully. "I am so tired."

Rob did not begrudge me that. She closed her poor, fear-tortured eyes, and sank at last into a blessed sleep. Slowly then not to waken her, though I knew that never on earth should I look into the depths of her eyes again—I unloosed the thin, sweet hand, the dear, dear hand that clung to mine.

"I am making away to-morrow, Rob," I said. "It is clear sailing for you now. You will delay your going a day or two, but not longer. It is all arranged about the boat that will take you over. Let Belcher know for what day and tide you will need it, that is all. So—good-by, old man."

“But, Jim,” he said, following me to the door; “Jim.” Except for my name, which he could speak, his mouth made soundless motions like a stutterer’s.

I laughed as I grasped his hand. *Someone* must stand firm. “Wish me joy, old fellow. I’m off to sea before you.”

“But—Jim——” He put his arm around my neck. I caught the sound of a sob that seemed to tear the strong fellow’s heart, and I tore myself from him and dashed away to the River.

CHAPTER XXXI

POWER LOT, GOD HELP US

CUBY had not made too sanguine a promise; she was a good sailor, indeed. So we cruised far, making a strange port now and then, until at last we anchored by the little fishing hamlet which we have known for home ever since, and which we knew for home as soon as ever we had entered it.

In certain storms, in certain great winds, the surf knocks even at our door. If we are content with our nest by the cliffs—still, we know the way of the voyager that reckons on no long abiding. It is his calling, never forgotten of his soul—the calling of the voyager. Though he was content in his dwelling by the shore, and cruised not far any more—as once he did—but watched the tides and hauled his nets, and dwelt at peace with children and wife, and all the souls about him; still, ever the calling of the sea is upon him, and them.

It is but nature, and nature is but God; and none shall lose his way in the wildest night, clinging by wreck or spar—none shall lose his way. This is the knowledge of the voyager.

It was five years after Cuby and I had sailed away from Power Lot, God Help Us, and the River. It happened strangely. Two miles farther down the shore there is a little colony of “summer cottages” and a

fine inn for travelers, whose life is as remote from ours as though we and they inhabited different continents.

It happened one day when I had delivered some fish, by order, at the inn; and a waiter of finer manners and clothes than any I had ever dreamed of wearing had brought the money to me in the kitchen. I heard, thrashing and slewing 'round to the porch, one of those fiend carriages that fly over country without horses. It was a very large and splendid contraption of its kind, and in it sat—Rob Hilton.

“Who is that?” I said sharply to the waiter in broadcloth, not knowing what I said.

“Swell by the name of Hilton,” he replied. “Him and his wife came last night with their shofer. Big swells. Engaged the most desirable rooms in the house for three days. Touring the country. Fine people. Grand style.”

I made my way home. I said nothing to Cuby, who slept as soundly as our boys even before the darkness had well settled down. But when I thought that Rob would have finished his dinner and might possibly go strolling about the shore near the inn with his cigar, I made my way over there again. I stood out of sight in the lee of an old black hulk that had been wrecked and thrown up there long ago, watching.

There were many people on the piazzas of the inn. Rob was not among those people, nor Mary.

I waited, moistening my parched lips, and with straining eyes as the shadows grew heavier; and, in spite of hope, could hardly believe my senses when at last a big figure, emerging from the door, loomed up and sauntered slowly down along the shore toward

the old vessel's hulk. I saw the glowing spark of his cigar drawing near and nearer.

"Rob," I said softly and gladly; "hello, Rob!"

The cigar fell from his lips, scattering its sparks upon the beach. "Jim!" he cried, and rushed toward me. If he had thrown his arm around me condescendingly, if he had reeled off glibly any words of astonishment and delight at the meeting, I should have hated him. But he was always *Rob*.

"Jim," said he of the child-heart, standing pale and trembling with a visible joy before me; and this was the way he spoke to me, the fisherman, putting me above him, as it were, and not beneath, for the greatness of his heart; "Jim," he said, smiling the old smile in my face, "I've never touched a drop."

I laughed. The breezes of the corn fields at Power Lot, God Help Us, seemed to blow again in my face, and there again Rob leaned on his hoe, in faded flannel shirt, responding eagerly if any poor denizen of the place paused to talk with him as a brother. I drew him to one of the benches where the idle summer people sat by day. The hour I was to have with him seemed like an eternity of joy.

"Jim—is it really you? We tried and tried to find trace of you, Mary and I. We wanted to make you rich. We are going to do it now. Why, it just belongs to you, that's all!"

"Ah no! No! I prefer to stand where I do, lad, by the work of my own hands; friendly, on the same level and as well off in the world as you; for it is all well with you; you were born to it and know how to carry it. But for me, I think a man may have too

much to carry, so that he cannot sail free, or fears to sail at all. I was never one that wished to be much hampered."

Rob's blue eyes caught fire in the night as he looked into mine.

"Well, we are sailing free too—Mary and I. You thought the money would swallow us!" he went on. "We are not keeping it, Jim—not using it for ourselves. We've started colonies—we're starting one in this territory—homes for people to work the land and live as God meant people to live. We make their homes easy to earn. And in the city"—he plucked me by the arm—his words came fast—"in the city, Jim, we work there too for people. We work all the time. You ought to see our tenements. Jim, we work—we work."

"Glory be to God!" I said, my arm on his shoulder. The soul of the voyager was his. He had not settled down in a prison of gold on a bed of down.

"Hurrah!" I said, "we are voyagers still together."

"Did you think," he said, "I would go back to any sty, after my view off Power Lot? It would be but a sty, though with a dozen servants to order it. It would be but a selfish sty!" His eyes shone—oh, but he was a lusty voyager, ready for the storm, ready for the next call—he! I thought we stood on the mountains again together and it was he that had lifted me.

"But come," he said. "Mary will be wild to see you."

"Wait," I answered him; "what matter? Let this be our meeting, this between you and me; it is all one. No, I won't go in! Don't bother me with ques-

tions, lad. It is better so. Say nothing to her. We have hailed and met and shall hail and meet again; but now the time is short. It is all one."

"Jim, we have one child, one little boy, at home. His name is Jim."

"Honest?"

"He is James Turbine Hilton."

My rough hand was laid on his. The tears sprang to my eyes.

"God bless you, Rob!" We thought alike. "One of my three little fellows is named Robert Hilton Turbine."

"Heaven help him." Rob shed on me the peculiar, familiar radiance of his smile. "Make him work for a living, Jim."

"Aye."

We made no phrases. We talked as travelers, meeting and parting, and the words grew tense and so prescient of this near and last farewell that they babbled over at last into pleasant dreamings, like those that come frequently to cast to the winds the stilted awe with which humanity surrounds the dying.

So I told him what I had picked up in chance voyages of the people of Power Lot. "And little Rhody has passed on," I said. "Bert, who hung off here for a day or two in his schooner, told me. Queer, too; she seemed built for a long trip, didn't she? Sturdy as a little oak."

"She and I made many a vow. We made many a promise to each other," Rob said.

"Her father ran away to another woman," I went on, "and Rhody got ill-treated—not beaten, as I heard—but neglected and put upon worse than ever. They

took her into the 'church,' you know, and she had a great notion of being faithful. She got kind of run down and disconsolate with all that was put upon her; and she took a hard cold that turned into a fever, and she died. She was a stout little lass, stout in spirit as well as body."

"Well," said Rob, "we raced each other to Pompey Rock and home again, many and many a time. We made more vows to each other, she and I."

He laughed, but the tears stood in his eyes as he spoke:

"One was, that if she went first, she'd get things all cleared up for me over yonder—establish a sort of prestige of good-will for me, so to speak, and answer my trembling knock at the gate. If I went first, I'd do it for her—if I was so lucky as to get in there. That was the vow. Well, I shall keep my vow. Perhaps children know the way, after all. Whoever passes in at that dim gate before me, even though it might be wife or child, I'll look for Rhody first. The rest might wait. It should be Rhody first of all. Poor little lass! Dear little lass!"

He had remembered Power Lot well.

He turned to me and smiled; and on the sweet faces of womankind and children I never saw so beautiful a smile as was on Rob's face then.

"After all, it's only one brief strait at last," he said; "the same short strait for all."

"Aye, only just the Gut—no more."

"One saw it all at Power Lot—the dark little Gut and the shining infinite each side. One saw so clearly there. But I remember."

"Aye, lad, we remember. And may the tide set strong and the wind breeze high when we make out through that last strait into the open! So we shall hail each other there again, and never fear, my lad——"

"I'll have no fear, my brother Jim," said Rob. The grasp of his hand on mine, I feel it still. And so I turned and left him.

THE END

K A T R I N A

BY

ROY ROLFE GILSON

Author of "In the Morning Glow "

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